THE LIFE

OF THE

Rev. John William Fletcher,

VICAR OF MADELEY:

BY THE

REV. ROBERT COX, A. M.

FIRST AMERICAN EDITION:

WITH

AN INTRODUCTION, AND A SELECTION FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE OF MR. FLETCHER:

BY

THE REV. GEORGE A. SMITH, M. A.

"No age or country has ever produced a man of more fervent piety, or more perfect charity; no church has ever possessed a more apostolic minister."—SOUTHEY.

"Fletcher was a man of heavenly temper; a saint, in the ancient and high sense of the term; whose enthusiasm was entirely unmixed with bitterness, and whose life and death were alike edifying."—QUARTERLY REVIEW.

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INTRODUCTION.

The excellence of the christian religion is most effectually displayed in the examples of individuals, whose characters it has formed, and whose lives it has directed. Such, happily, do appear in every age of the church, and among them some who shine with peculiar lustre. These, to some extent at least, it is the duty and happiness of every faithful christian to contemplate. While he looks upon them, the brightness of the character which he admires, is often reflected upon himself. The best feelings of his heart glow with a sympathetic influence, his principles acquire strength, and his purposes steadfastness, as he beholds "the beauty of holiness" in its living exemplification. The lukewarm, too, are often rebuked and affected by the contrast to their own unworthiness, while the unconverted learn that there is a reality in all the promises of religion, which they may experience, if they will but yield themselves to its power.

Among the excellent men of modern times, there is probably none in whose praise there is so general a concurrence as in that of Fletcher. Upon some points of religious truth he differed from many whom he loved, and such differences of opinion will doubtless be coeval with the imperfection of human intellect and character. But it is delightful to see that their existence is admitted not to be incompatible, in the view of either party, with a bright and consistent display of christian character. The estimation in which Fletcher has been held by Calvinists and Arminians, is a striking exemplification of this remark. Another is to be found in an incident related by the Rev. Charles Simeon, which shows so strikingly the effect which may be expected from the study of such a character as that of Fletcher among Arminians, or of a similar one among Calvinists, that no apology is deemed necessary for its introduction. It is quoted from the preface to Mr. Simeon's "Skeletons," in which the excellent author is said to speak of himself, as the "young minister" who held the conversation with Mr. Wesley.

"A young minister, about three or four years after he was ordained, had an opportunity of conversing familiarly with the great and venerable leader of the Arminians in this kingdom, and wishing to improve the occasion to the uttermost, he addressed him nearly in the following words:—'Sir, I understand that you are called an Arminian, I have been sometimes called a Calvinist, and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers; but before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission, I will ask you a few questions, not from impertinent curiosity, but for real instruction.' Permission being very readily and kindly granted, the young minister proceeded to ask, 'Pray, Sir, do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God, if God had not first put it into your heart?' 'Yes,' says the veteran, 'I do indeed.' 'And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything that you can do, and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?' 'Yes, solely through Christ.' 'But, Sir, suppose you were at first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself afterwards by your own works?' 'No; I must be saved by Christ from first to last.' 'Allowing then that you have first turned by the grace of God, are you not now, in some way or other, to help yourself by your own power?'—'No.' 'What, then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother's arms?' 'Yes, altogether.' 'And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God, to preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom?' 'Yes, I have no hope but in him.' 'Then, Sir, with your leave, I will put up my dagger again, for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election—my justification by faith—my final perseverance: it is in substance all that I hold, and as I hold it; and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree.'

"The Arminian leader was so pleased with the conversation, that he made particular mention of it in his journals, and notwithstanding there never afterwards was any connexion between the parties, he retained an unfeigned regard for his young inquirer to the hour of his death."

Mr. Wesley was a most intimate and beloved friend of Fletcher, and wrote an account of his life, which thus concludes:—

"I was intimately acquainted with him for thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon and night, without the least reserve, during a journey of many hundred miles. And in all that time I never heard him speak an improper word, or saw him do an improper action. To conclude. Within fourscore years I have known many excellent men, holy in heart and life. But one equal to him I have not known; one so uniformly and deeply devoted to God. So unblameable a man in every respect, I have not found either in Europe or America. Nor do I expect to find another such on this side eternity."

Mr. Wesley's estimate of Fletcher's character is beautifully illustrated by the motto of the book which has just been quoted,

SEQUOR NON PASSIBUS ÆQUIS.*

Many have undertaken to present a general view of the character of Fletcher, and perhaps no one with greater success than a writer in the Christian Observer for 1822. In a long article on the merits of Cox's life of Fletcher, there is to be found such a sketch, executed with so much judgment and ability, and possessing such interest, that nothing more appropriate could be presented in an introduction to the life of Fletcher. The writer, after detailing some of the incidents in his life, thus delineates the most striking features of his character.*

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* I follow, with unequal steps.

"The most striking peculiarity of Mr. Fletcher's character was doubtless *his uniform and exalted piety;* that devotional spirit which seems hardly ever to have abandoned him, and which threw a sort of unearthly and angelic lustre over the whole current of his life. It made its appearance in childhood; was perhaps a little impaired during the first years of youth, but soon burst forth with new vigour, and continued to burn with a bright and steady flame throughout the remainder of his days. One anecdote, mentioned by Mr. Cox, I shall relate. 'One day, while quite a child, having displeased his father, he ran away from him to avoid correction, and endeavoured to conceal himself. But his conduct presently struck him with remorse. "What," said he, "do I run away from my father? Perhaps I shall live to have a son that will run away from me."' This was a remark which, in a mere child, discovered a spirit of reflection and a sense of duty betokening no ordinary character in after life. The language of Dr. Price respecting him speaks a volume, when we consider the person from whose lips it came. He is said to have expressed 'his satisfaction at *being introduced to the company of one whose air and countenance bespoke him fitted rather*

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* Some of the remarks on the enthusiasm attributed to Fletcher have been omitted, from the belief that what is retained is entirely sufficient in relation to this subject.

for the society of angels, than for the conversation of men.'

"Mr. Cox rightly attributes the unabated influence of his devotional spirit to 'the power which he so preeminently possessed, of living as in the presence of God, by habitual recollection.' It is not perhaps sufficiently considered how difficult of attainment is such a degree of piety among christians engaged in the ordinary concerns of life. The faithful minister of the sanctuary has in this respect a manifest advantage over most of the laity, by the general bearing and tendency of his studies and pursuits; though very few indeed, even amongst this highly favoured class of individuals, are found to approach the standard of Mr. Fletcher's spirituality of habit. In the case of christians busied about their worldly occupations, such an attainment is still more difficult. The constitution of the human mind admits but of one train of ideas at the same time: consequently, wherever an elevated spirit of piety is maintained in the soul, it must be kept up, under the needful influences of Divine grace, by *a frequent recurrence of the thoughts to God and religious considerations*. This is indeed truly difficult amidst the common occupations of life; but it is not impracticable. There are examples to be found, rare examples indeed, of men who can carry a highly devotional spirit along with them, even into the counting house or the exchange, and who contrive to preserve a steady frame of cheerful piety in the transaction of their worldly affairs, without, at the same time, betraying any want of prudence, management, or dexterity. Their talent is truly enviable; and their happy art must have been taught them by a Divine Instructor; whose influences, however, for our encouragement be it remembered, will not be withheld from any who humbly endeavour to copy their bright example, and to follow them as they follow Christ Jesus.

"Again: the characteristic qualities of the mind and heart may perhaps be of such a nature as to afford some individuals an advantage over others, in the cultivation of this habitual piety. A feeling heart and a lively imagination give a certain impulse and development to religious principle; which impulse will be found less operative in a cold and calculating disposition. Were it true that any of the fallen posterity of Adam are formed by nature to feel the steady influence of piety, it might be said with apparent propriety, that Fletcher was one of these bright instances; yet even he, pre-eminent as were his christian graces, possessed an evil nature at war with the spirit of his mind, and which required the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. Still we may perhaps allowably conjecture, that the soil, when once impregnated with the seed of divine grace, was aided, in some small degree, by the liveliness and elevation of his fancy, and the warm sensibility of his heart; though, at the same time, it may be fairly replied, that these qualities were equally open to the influence of the world and of sin; so that, after all, the balance is more equal among christians of different tempers and habits, than at first sight appears.

"I should be much concerned, if these observations, naturally suggested by the subject under review, should be construed into any apology for indifference with regard to the cultivation of a high tone of piety and devotion. Truly would I say, God forbid that this should be their effect. On the one hand, let the highly devotional Christian imitate the conduct of Fletcher, and of one far greater than Fletcher, in being careful *not to break the bruised reed, or to quench the smoking flax;* and let him manifest the influence of his charity, in not judging harshly of those sincere believers who fall short of his own attainments. And, on the other, let those weaker christians, who perceive in themselves a great want of the spirit of *habitual and constant piety*, cease to think it an impossible acquisition, and be encouraged, by the example of such men as Fletcher, to seek after continual advances in the divine life.

"*Great humility in his intercourse with others* was another striking peculiarity of this extraordinary person. Some amusing instances of this are produced by his biographers. He refused to visit the poor Protestants of the Cevennes on horseback, saying to his fellow traveller, who had objected to his pedestrian propensities, 'Shall I make a visit on horseback, and at ease, to those poor cottagers, whose fathers were hunted along yonder rocks, like partridges upon the mountains?' At another time, his friend, the Rev. Mr. Gilpin, perceiving a funeral waiting at the church gate, took the surplice, and commenced the service; but he had hardly entered the desk, when Mr. Fletcher, who had been visiting a sick person, came into the church; and gently drawing away a lad, who was officiating in the absence of the clerk, took his place, and acted as clerk to Mr. Gilpin. Nothing seemed hard, nothing wearisome, which tended to promote the good of his neighbours. Mrs. Fletcher was frequently grieved to call him out of his study two or three times in an hour; especially when she knew he was engaged in some important work. But on such occasions he would answer, with his usual piety, 'Oh, never mind. It matters not what is the employment, if we are but ready to meet the will of God. It is conformity to his will alone that makes any employment excellent.' If he overtook a poor person on the road, with a burden too heavy for him, he would offer to bear a part of it, and would not easily take a denial. To a person unacquainted with the whole of his character, these instances might seem to border upon *a voluntary* and ostentatious *humility.* But I do not suspect him of having been, at any time, actuated by those motives of ambition, which may sometimes have influenced the Franciscan Friar in his professions of poverty, whether of purse or spirit. If there was one feature which predominated above another in Mr. Fletcher, it was *simplicity.* But, though the instances just mentioned do not impeach his sincerity of heart, they detract a little from the credit of his judgment, and are parts of his character savouring too much of needless singularity to be proposed as a model for imitation. There were, however, many circumstances in which his humility shone to more advantage.

"It does not always happen that persons of a studious and devotional temper are distinguished for *bodily exertion and active usefulness.* Some, who have been too much addicted to what is called mysticism in religion, may be said to have wasted their days amidst the clouds of abstract contemplation, when they might have been more properly employed in discharging their duties upon the level of active life. We are informed by Burnet, that even the learned, argumentative, and excellent Bishop Pearson, was more distinguished for exertion in his study than in his diocese. I am not about to compare Fletcher with Bishop Pearson in point of learning and judgment. The latter was far superior in these respects. But perhaps, in return, this good prelate might have been able to derive a useful lesson from Fletcher's *unwearied assiduity in his pastoral office,* had he lived to witness it. Here he was 'instant in season, and out of season.' He may be said to have strictly followed the advice of St. Paul to Timothy, in 'giving himself wholly' to his ministerial labours. 'In his daily walks through his parish,' says Mr. Cox, 'there was hardly an individual who escaped his notice; and he had for each a word in season, adapted to his character, circumstances, and capacity. Always in his work, he was never out of his way. Whole nights he waited on the humblest and most infectious sick. If he heard the knocker in the coldest winter night, his window was instantly opened; and when he understood either that some one was hurt in the pits, or that a neighbour was likely to die; no consideration was ever paid to the darkness of the night, or the severity of the weather; but this answer was uniformly given, "I will attend you immediately."' He at last fell a sacrifice to zeal in his public ministrations, when a little seasonable prudence would probably have lengthened his life. But it is not given to any human being to possess wisdom at all times; and those great and daring spirits, who have performed more in twenty years of exertion, than ordinary men do in fifty, have not unusually become the victims of an ardour utterly disproportionate to the short span of human existence. Their very conviction of its shortness has sometimes cut them off before the ordinary term of life, by stimulating them to a career of exertion beyond their strength. But, without any wish to detract from Fletcher's zeal, something must be attributed likewise to his physical powers. He is represented as a man of a constitution naturally vigorous, which, if it were injured, at one time, by an excess of night-study, was, on the other hand, improved by the most rigid temperance. The man, who, in his youth, more than once swam five miles at a stretch, must have been gifted with great muscular strength, and with a texture of animal fibre not easily disordered.

"I come next to his *disinterestedness.*—This was a very striking feature of his character. When offered the living of Dunham, in Cheshire, which was worth about 400*l.* a year, he thanked his patron, and replied, 'Alas! sir, Dunham will not suit me: there is too much money, and too little labour.' He afterwards accepted Madeley, on the ground of its being a wider field of exertion, though without half the pay. On some of his tracts being shown to the King by the Chancellor, an offer of preferment was immediately made him: but he answered, with his characteristic simplicity, that 'he wanted nothing but an increase of grace.' This reply will perhaps remind some of your readers of the anecdote of Père Bernard; a man who was constant in his unpaid attendance upon the unfortunate persons of his time at Paris, who suffered by the hands of the executioner. He refused a rich abbey offered him by Cardinal Richelieu; and when the Cardinal, upon another occasion, desired him to say what he could do for him, the father replied, 'All I want, my lord, is a better tumbril to conduct my penitents to their place of suffering.' The tub of Diogenes was a poor and paltry subject of contentment, when compared with this benevolent ambition of the good Pere Bernard.

"Several anecdotes are related in Mr. Cox's work, and the other memoirs of Mr. Fletcher, strongly expressive of the *pecuniary liberality* of this excellent individual; but it is not my object to trespass too much with details; and it will be easily believed, that a man who was benevolent and disinterested in so remarkable a degree, would not be wanting in alms-giving, or any other duty of christian charity, so far as he had the opportunity. Indeed he carried the practice of this virtue to an extremity of self-denial and personal privation, which reminds one more of the days when the disciples had all things in common, and no man called any thing his own, than of the ordinary dispositions or allotments of modern christians.

"His *courage* and *intrepidity* were very remarkable.—There is an anecdote related by his biographers on this subject, so striking, that I cannot resist the temptation of presenting it to your readers. Mr. Fletcher had a very profligate nephew, a military man, who had been dismissed from the Sardinian service for base and ungentlemanly conduct. He had engaged in two or three duels, and dissipated his resources in a career of vice and extravagance. This desperate youth waited one day on his eldest uncle, General de Gons, and, presenting a loaded pistol, threatened to shoot him unless he would immediately advance him five hundred crowns. The general, though a brave man, well knew what a desperado he had to deal with, and gave a draft for the money, at the same time expostulating freely with him on his conduct. The young madman rode off triumphantly with his ill-gotten acquisition. In the evening, passing the door of his younger uncle, Mr. Fletcher, he determined to call on him, and began with informing him what General de Gons had done: and as a proof, exhibited the draft under De Gons's own hand. Mr. Fletcher took the draft from his nephew, and looked at it with astonishment. Then, after some remarks, putting it into his pocket, said—'It strikes me, young man, that you have possessed yourself of this note by some indirect method; and in honesty I cannot return it, but with my brother's knowledge and approbation.' The nephew's pistol was immediately at his breast. 'My life,' replied Mr. Fletcher with perfect calmness, 'is secure in the protection of an Almighty power; nor will he suffer it to be the forfeit of my integrity and of your rashness.' This firmness drew from the nephew the observation, that his uncle De Gons, though an old soldier, was more afraid of death than his brother. 'Afraid of death!' rejoined Mr. Fletcher; 'do you think I have been twenty-five years the minister of the Lord of life, to be afraid of death now? No, sir: it is for *you* to fear death. *You* are a gamester and a cheat, yet call yourself a gentleman! You are the seducer of female innocence, and still say you are a gentleman! You are a duellist, and for this you style yourself a man of honour! Look there, sir; the broad eye of heaven is fixed upon us. Tremble in the presence of your Maker, who can in a moment kill your body, and for ever punish your soul in hell.' The unhappy man turned pale, and trembled alternately with fear and rage. He still threatened his uncle with instant death. Fletcher, though thus menaced, gave no alarm, sought for no weapon, and attempted not to escape. He calmly conversed with his profligate relation, and, at length perceiving him to be affected, addressed him in language truly paternal, till he had fairly disarmed and subdued him. He would not return his brother's draft, but engaged to procure for the young man some immediate relief. He then prayed with him, and, after fulfilling his promise of assistance, parted with him, with much good advice on one side, and many fair promises on the other. The power of courage, founded on piety and principle, together with its influence in overcoming the wildest and most desperate profligacy, were never more finely illustrated than by this anecdote. It deserves to be put into the hands of every self-styled 'man of honour,' to show him how far superior is the courage that dares to die, though it dares not sin, to the boasted prowess of a mere man of the world. How utterly contemptible does the desperation of a duellist appear, when contrasted with the noble intrepidity of such a christian soldier as the humble vicar of Madeley!

"If Mr. Fletcher's reply to his nephew, as given by his biographers, be correct, it exhibits a specimen of indignant eloquence which was never, perhaps, surpassed, and has not often been equalled. Here indeed was a *dignus vindice nodus;* an occasion worthy of the man.

"Of Mr. Fletcher's force and vivacity in writing, many instances might be produced; but for these I must refer the reader to his publications. It is, however, but just to add, that some of his most spirited passages are by no means equally remarkable for exactness, power of discrimination, or refinement of taste. It should be remembered, in abatement of any literary defects, that he was writing in a language not his own; and, for a foreigner, his prompt command of our vernacular tongue is often surprising.

"Mr. Fletcher was certainly not free from some tincture of *enthusiasm*, properly so called. When quite a youth, his remonstrance with a widow lady who had been provoked, by the ill conduct of her profligate sons, to utter a sort of hasty imprecation against them, looks, perhaps, too much like the presumption of denouncing a judgment upon her for her impiety. Awful to relate, however,—though certainly not in consequence of Fletcher's prediction,—all her three sons shortly met with an untimely grave, and she called Fletcher, ever afterwards, *her young prophet*. Some part of his advice, in his correspondence with a young lady, may be styled injudicious, if not enthusiastic; and his apparently unmixed approbation of the proceedings of Mr. Wesley, and his itinerant preachers, strongly savours of the same spirit. His rapturous and triumphant frame of mind, at the approach of death, is, however, by no means to be ascribed to this influence. Who shall presume to say to what extent God may sometimes be pleased to visit and cheer his faithful servants under such circumstances? And, if visions of glory be sometimes, then, vouchsafed to the departing saint, upon whom might we expect them to descend sooner than upon this devout person?

"In truth, Fletcher displayed much less of what may be properly termed *enthusiasm,* than has been commonly supposed. There is no single word in the English vocabulary more frequently distorted from its true meaning than this. In ordinary discourse, we find it perpetually confounded with *great zeal in the cause of religion;* whereas the most fervent zeal has no *necessary* or *unavoidable* connexion with enthusiasm, meaning by the term 'a heated imagination,' though, in consequence of the frailty of human nature, even in the best of men, it may, in some instances, be combined with the last mentioned quality. *Enthusiasm* or *fanaticism,* (for this is now the favourite watchword of party spirit, as being perhaps the stronger and more sonorous expression of the two,) implies, when used in reference to religion, either *something which tends to encourage the belief of false revelations and false miracles, or something at least which tends to disfigure true religion, by unintentionally representing it under the form of an absurd theory, or an impracticable attainment.* Let Mr. Fletcher's conduct be tried by these definitions, and he will be found to stand tolerably clear of the charge. And if some few parts of his conduct seem to look like real enthusiasm, let him not be judged too harshly by those who are rescued from all danger in this respect, not by their superior piety, but by their cooler temperament. If they have less enthusiasm than Mr. Fletcher, let them ask themselves whether they have as much fervent and well-directed zeal.

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"If we are to judge of his general *preaching* by some outlines of unwritten sermons which have been preserved, he would appear to have been more highly gifted with the talent of *invention* than with that of *selection* and orderly *arrangement.* In the outline, for example, given by Mr. Cox, of a sermon on Luke xii. 20. there is no want of matter; but the discourse is broken down into too many parts, and some of his divisions are trifling or improper. Perhaps his taste in preaching would have been more correct, had he devoted more attention to the study of polite literature. This he totally neglected during the latter years of his life. He had an imagination eminently formed to feel the full force both of the pathetic and the sublime. But he was too much absorbed in the plain obvious duties of his great work, to find time or patience for studying anything that tended only subordinately to promote his paramount object. Still his preaching, however deficient in good taste, must have possessed the eloquence of nature and reality. One trait well deserves to be recorded. In the midst, says his biographer, of a most animated description of the terrible day of the Lord, he suddenly paused; every feature of his expressive countenance was marked with painful feeling; and striking his forehead with the palm of his hand, he exclaimed, 'Wretched man that I am!—Beloved brethren, it often cuts me to the soul, as it does at this moment, to reflect, that while I have been endeavouring by the force of truth, by the beauty of holiness, and even by the terrors of the Lord, to bring you to walk in the paths of righteousness, I am, with respect to many who reject the gospel, only tying millstones round your neck to sink you deeper in perdition!' The whole church, it is added, was electrified; and it was some time before he could resume his subject. Massillon's celebrated apostrophe on the day of judgment, which produced such emotion in his courtly audience, was adapted for the cultivated meridian of Paris: Fletcher's interruption was admirably suited to strike the rude villagers of Madeley. Massillon's was elaborate and sublime: Fletcher's was simple and pathetic. It was an arrow that went directly to the heart.

"His *powers of conversation* appear to have been very remarkable. There are two instances related, in which he combatted infidel, or at least skeptical opponents, with such force of reasoning, such admirable restraint of temper, and such christian meekness, as produced a very considerable effect upon their minds. He had a clear and solid judgment, whenever he calmly exercised that faculty.

"I can merely touch upon some minor excellencies of the character of this remarkable man. There was nothing in his conduct savouring of violence or vulgarity. His family being nobly allied, and his education liberal, he retained a polish and urbanity, which, while it never interfered with the faithful discharge of his ministerial duties, served to recommend him to persons of rank and influence. Yet such was his indifference to worldly distinctions, that owing to a mistake which he had never been at the pains to rectify, his wife for some time believed him to have been the son of a common soldier only, instead of a general officer. Even his eccentricities were respectable; and the circumstance of his going round his parish at five o'clock on Sunday mornings, with a bell, to summon the idlers of his flock to prepare for church, though it may excite a smile, can never seriously degrade him in the estimation of any liberal and reflecting mind.

"Such was Mr. Fletcher, the Vicar of Madeley. He was, in many respects, *a burning and a shining light;* not, indeed, exempt from human frailty, but affording a memorable example of the power of genuine christianity to purify, exalt, and ennoble the character of man. Let us, for a moment, imagine what such a person as Mr. Fletcher might have proved, without the influences of divine grace, and the tuition of the gospel of Christ. Probably he would have been still amiable, candid, benevolent, upright and enterprising. He might have proved, in his humbler sphere of action, what an Antoninus Pius was, upon the seat of the Roman empire. But all his exertions would have been confined to the *temporal* benefit of his fellow creatures; and probably a conviction of the little he could perform for the alleviation of human misery, might in some degree have paralyzed his labours, and dried up the source of his philanthropy. But view him as a minister of Christ, impressed with a firm belief of the gospel, and with a deep sense of his own personal responsibility in delivering the message of reconciliation to a careless and corrupt world, and how are all his natural qualifications for usefulness stimulated and improved! He now finds an object worthy of the utmost ardour of his spirit. Inflamed with the love of God, and deeply touched with compassion for the souls of men, he possesses motives for exertion infinitely superior to any with which he could be furnished by mere worldly considerations. When checked by occasional discouragements, he supports his courage, prompts his perseverance, and keeps alive his activity, by a reference to the commands and promises of Scripture: and by dependence on the strength of an Almighty arm. In the meantime, he is not insensible to the *great recompense of reward,* and to the dreadful consequences of losing it. This obliges him to '*keep his heart with all diligence;*' and, in watching over his own personal advancement in religion, he finds that he is promoting most effectually the spiritual good of others, and that his example adds tenfold weight to his instructions.

"It is, perhaps, vain to hope for many such brilliant exhibitions of christian piety and holiness, until that period, when 'the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.' Providence, however, has graciously ordained that a few such 'lights in the world' should arise in every age, for the purpose of showing what true religion is able to do for men, putting to shame the languid and lukewarm professor of christianity, and rousing the sincere believer to greater vigilance and exertion. Instances of this kind are *patterns of good works;* which ought to be preserved, like the great master-pieces in cabinets of art, as proper objects for the study of all who desire to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* It is true, there is but one who *did no sin,* and in whom every species of perfection is to be found. Let *Him* ever be the grand model for our imitation. But let us, at the same time, follow others, in proportion as they followed the Saviour, and learn to admire and copy his excellence as it appears reflected in those who have most *adorned his doctrine,* and extended farthest the boundaries of his kingdom."

The writer to whom we are indebted for this able and interesting view of the character of Fletcher, says, in a previous part of his essay, "I am not aware that Mr. Cox has added much to the stock of materials amassed by Mr. Benson, Mr. Gilpin, and other memorialists of Mr. Fletcher. Indeed, his work is professedly a compilation; so much so that he often incorporates the words as well as the facts of his originals in his narrative, wherever they seemed proper to his purpose. Still his memoir is *the best that has appeared.*"

The Christian Observer for 1831, in an editorial notice of a sermon by our author, (the Rev. Robert Cox, M. A., Perpetual Curate of Storehouse,) says—"Mr. Cox's former publications, especially his lives of the Fathers, his *memoir of Fletcher,* and his pious and judicious Horæ Romanæ, will already have bespoken the favourable regards of our readers to the present discourse."

A memoir of such a man, so highly and justly recommended, ought not to remain unknown to American readers, especially as there is no other upon the same subject in general circulation. In presenting the present edition, there has been added a selection of the most interesting and valuable part of the correspondence of Fletcher, from his posthumous works edited by the Rev. Melville Horne. These have been published in a single volume, of which the correspondence constitutes by far the larger part. A short treatise and some miscellaneous pieces make up the remainder. Some interesting particulars relative to the intercourse of Mr. Horne (the eloquent and "trumpet-tongued" writer on missions,) with Mr. Fletcher, will be found in the following memoir, page 141.

Of the letters now selected for publication some are partially quoted by Mr. Cox; but it is presumed that the reader will be gratified to have them complete. The circumstances in which the remainder and larger portion were written, will be seen by a comparison of their dates with the corresponding periods in the memoir. The language of Mr. Horne in reference to these letters of Mr. Fletcher, is adopted by the editor of the present edition of his life as expressive of his wishes and prayers for the influence of the whole publication.

"If the many friends who revere his memory, find edification and delight in perusing his apostolic letters; if any whose opposition of sentiment would not allow them to converse with him as a polemic divine, shall now receive him to their breasts as a christian brother; if any who have not reaped the rich harvest of his former writings, are benefitted by the gleanings of the field; and if the world in general is made better acquainted with the virtues of this excellent man, all the ends proposed by their publication will be obtained, and the Editor will think himself justified in giving them to the press.

"That the benediction of the Almighty may attend these last labours of his servant, that the reader may imbibe the spirit of the author, and that myself and all my fellow-labourers in the gospel, may emulate his faith and work in the Lord, is the earnest desire of THE EDITOR."

THE LIFE

OF

THE REV. J. W. FLETCHER.

CHAPTER I.

FAMILY—EDUCATION—EVENTS OF HIS YOUTH.

"Among christian pastors," remarks the editor of a celebrated periodical work,* "who have adorned their profession by piety, fidelity, and zeal, there will be found no one, perhaps, whose history better deserves to be recorded than the late Mr. Fletcher, the far-famed Vicar of Madeley. His life, independently of those peculiarities of character, which render it an interesting exhibition to the philosophic observer of mankind, affords more variety than we usually meet with in the career of a minister of the gospel. And even the circumstance of his having been a foreigner, naturalized as it were upon English ground, attracts attention by its rarity; and adds something to the interest which the view of his talents, virtues, and attainments, is so well calculated to excite."

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*The Christian Observer. The same work, in speaking of books calculated for usefulness, says, " Among such works the life of the sainted Fletcher, of Madeley, has recently been given to the readers of French literature." —Vol. xxviii. 123.—Am. Ed.

Jean Guillaume De La Flechere, or, as he was generally designated in this his adopted country, John William Fletcher, was born in Switzerland, at Nyon, in the Pays de Vaud, in the year 1729. His father in the former part of his life had been an officer in the French service: on his marriage he retired from the army; but an early predilection for his profession induced him afterwards to accept of a colonelcy in the militia of his own country. Of this gentleman, who was a member of a respectable Bernese family, and a descendant of a noble house in Savoy, the subject of the following narrative was the youngest son.

At a very early period he discovered an unusual quickness of apprehension, and vivacity of character, happily blended with a deep sense of the Majesty of God, and a constant fear of offending Him. One day, when quite a child, having displeased his father, he ran away from him to avoid correction, and endeavoured to conceal himself in the garden. But his conduct soon struck him with remorse. "What!" said he, "do I run away from my father? Perhaps I shall live to have a son who will run away from me!" The impression that was then made upon his mind was not obliterated for many years.

Having quarrelled with one of his brothers when he was about seven years of age, he was reproved by a female servant, while she undressed him, and told of the punishment that awaited wicked children in another world. Her words deeply affected him. "I am," thought he, "a wicked boy, and how do I know but God may call me to account this night." He then rose from his bed, fell upon his knees before God, confessed his faults, and with deep contrition earnestly prayed for his forgiveness. "And I think," said he, when many years after he related the circumstance to a friend, "that God did hear me that night, and that I felt a little of the peace which I have since been better acquainted with."

An early reverence for the Scriptures happily preserved him from many of the vices peculiar to youth. His conversation was modest, and his whole conduct was marked by a degree of rectitude rarely found in persons of his age. He manifested also an extraordinary love for religious meditation; and those little productions which gained him the greatest applause at this period were chiefly of a serious tendency. As he grew up, his obedience as a son, and his affection as a brother, were exemplary; nor is it remembered that he ever uttered an unbecoming expression in either of those characters, unless indeed the following circumstance should be considered as involving an exception. His mother having on some occasion expressed herself too warmly to one of the family, he uttered a gentle reproof. Indignant at the reprehension, she instantly repaid it with some severity: but her displeasure was as suddenly converted into admiration, upon his replying, with a look of the tenderest affection,—"When I am smitten on one cheek, and especially by a hand I love so well, I am taught to turn the other also."

Having passed the early part of his boyhood at Nyon, young Fletcher was sent with his two brothers to the celebrated college at Geneva, where he was soon distinguished by the superiority of his talents, and the intensity of his application. The first two prizes for which he was a candidate he gained with much applause, though he had many competitors, some of whom were nearly related to the professors. So occupied was he with his literary pursuits that he scarcely allowed himself time for recreation or rest, not unfrequently spending the greater part of the night in digesting the studies of the preceding day. It was here that he acquired that classical taste which gave both dignity and refinement to his simple manners in after life, as well as laid the foundation of that philosophical and theological knowledge for which he was so justly distinguished.

It is pleasing to observe, that persons the most remarkable for their piety have often been equally distinguished by their attainments in literature. Surely, examples like the present, and they might be adduced without number, are sufficient to refute an opinion sometimes entertained, that men, eminently religious, are generally weak or ill-informed.

During their residence at Geneva, Fletcher and his two brothers lived with an elder sister, who had taken a house in that city for their accommodation. One day she was visited by a widow lady from Nyon, accompanied by her three sons, whose general profligacy of character, in addition to some present provocation, extorted from the irritated parent a hasty imprecation. Fletcher, who was a witness of this unnatural scene, started from his chair, conjured the mother to bear with patience the difficulties of her situation, urged the duty of attempting the reformation of her children, and declared that he trembled lest the imprecation she had uttered should be followed by some signal judgment. The same day the widow was nearly lost on the lake, on her return to Nyon; and shortly afterwards heard that two of her sons were drowned, and the third crushed to death at one of the gates of Geneva. "Her young prophet," as she was pleased to call him, was not at this time more than fourteen years of age.

There are scarcely any individuals who have not experienced some signal deliverances from danger; though few, it is to be feared, are properly affected by them. About this period, young Fletcher met with several providential escapes, which he never afterwards mentioned without the strongest expressions of gratitude. Of these, the following are the most memorable:—One day he and his elder brother were fencing with swords, sufficiently defended, as they supposed, by buttons fastened to the ends of them. His brother, however, giving a forcible thrust, the button broke, and his sword made a deep wound in Fletcher's side, the scar of which he carried to his grave.

At another time he and four other youths, in high spirits, made a solemn agreement to swim to a rocky island about five miles from the shore. This rash adventure nearly cost them their lives. Fletcher and another, having with great difficulty reached the spot, for some time despaired of ascending the island in consequence of the smoothness and steepness of the rock. At length, after many ineffectual efforts, they contrived to crawl up. They then returned to shore in a boat which they had ordered to follow them; their companions having previously been taken up in another, when they were on the point of sinking.

But the following deliverance, as related by himself, appears still more remarkable:—"Some years since I lived at a place very near the Rhine. In that part it is broader than the Thames at London bridge, and extremely rapid: but, having been long practised in swimming, I made no scruple of going into it at any time, being careful only to keep near the shore, that the stream might not carry me away. Once, however, being less careful than usual, I was unawares drawn into the midchannel. The water was extremely rough, and poured along like a galloping horse. I endeavoured to swim against it, but in vain; and was soon hurried far from home. When almost spent, I rested upon my back; and then looked about for a landing place, finding that I must either land or sink. With much difficulty I got near the shore: but the rocks were so rugged and sharp that I saw, if I attempted to land there, I should be torn in pieces; so I was constrained to turn again to the midstream. At last, despairing of life, I was cheered by the sight of a fine smooth creek, into which I was swiftly carried by a violent stream. A building stood directly across it, which I did not then know to be a powder mill. The last thing I can remember was the striking of my breast against one of the piles whereon it stood. I then lost my senses, and knew nothing more till I arose on the other side of the mill. When I came to myself I was in a calm, safe place, perfectly well;

nothing was amiss but the distance of my clothes, the stream having driven me five miles from the place where I left them. Many persons gladly welcomed me on shore: one gentleman, in particular, who said, —'I looked when you went under the mill, and again when you rose on the other side. The time of your being immerged among the piles was exactly twenty minutes.'"

After Fletcher had gone through the usual course of study at Geneva, he was sent by his father to Lenzburg, a small town in the canton of Lower Argovia, where, in addition to his other literary pursuits, he studied the German; and, on his leaving that place, he remained some time at home, diligently engaged in learning Hebrew, and reading the higher branches of the mathematics.

Until this period it appeared to have been no less the wish of Fletcher, than the intention of his parents, that he should be educated for the church. And surely no one could be considered as better qualified for the sacred office, with respect either to natural disposition, or mental capacity. His habits, his sentiments, and his studies; his reverential awe of God, his insatiable thirst after truth, and his uncommon abhorrence of vice,—all united, even at an early age, to convince his friends that he was designed for the service of the sanctuary. Contrary, however, to all expectation, before he had arrived at the age of twenty, he manifested views of a very different nature. The following is the account given by himself of this remarkable change in his intentions:—"From the time I first began to feel the love of God shed abroad in my heart, (I think at seven years of age,) I resolved to give myself up to God and to the service of His Church, if ever I should be fit for it: but the corruption which is in the world and that which was in my heart, soon weakened, if not erased, those first characters which grace had written upon it. However, I went through my studies with the design of going into orders: but afterwards, feeling I was unequal to so great a burthen, disgusted by the necessity I should be under to subscribe to the high Calvinism of the Geneva articles, and disapproving of entering upon so sacred an office from any secular motives; I yielded to the desire of those of my friends who advised me to enter into the army."

Such were the reasons which, according to his own statement, induced him to prefer the camp to the church. And may we not add as an additional motive, though he appears to have been unconscious of its existence, a secret desire after military glory, so natural to a youthful mind, and which could scarcely fail being excited in a man who, like Fletcher, was eminent for personal courage, energy of character, and skill in gymnastic exercises.

His pursuits were now materially changed. Fortifications became his favourite study: the systems of theologians were superseded by those of Vauban and Cohorn; and, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his parents, he determined to seek preferment as a soldier of fortune. To accomplish this design he went to Lisbon, where he obtained a captain's commission in the Portuguese service, and was ordered to be in readiness to sail for Brazil in a vessel which was then fitting out for the purpose. An opportune accident, however, occasioned by a servant's overturning a kettle of boiling water on his leg, confined him to his bed until the ship had sailed. And thus was he rescued from a situation where his valuable life would most probably have fallen a sacrifice; for the ship and all her crew were lost.

His military ardour, however, was not checked by this disappointment. Shortly after, hearing that there was a prospect of active service in the Netherlands, he hastened to Flanders, where his uncle, who was then a colonel in the Dutch service, had procured him a commission. But his prospects were again blasted by the ratifications of peace; and, his uncle shortly after dying, he gave up, at least for the present, all thoughts of entering into the army.

As he had now no particular engagement, he resolved, with the consent of his parents, to visit England, and to add to his other attainments a knowledge of our language. This journey, which he appears to have taken partly from a desire after further improvement in literature, and partly from a hope of obtaining some situation for his support in life, was over-ruled for the accomplishment of events infinitely important to himself and others. In consequence of this visit, his views on Divine subjects were enlarged, his religious character established, and his former purpose of entering the church resumed and effected; and it will not be too much to assert, that, due allowance being made for some peculiarities arising from his national feelings and habits, he became an illustrious model for christian ministers in every age.

Fletcher's first arrival in England was attended with circumstances somewhat discouraging. Having through heedlessness sealed his letters of introduction, and from the same cause, or, shall we say, from a simplicity of character which revolted from the semblance of a fraud, having taken no precautions to conceal them, they were naturally enough discovered, and as naturally seized by the officers at the custom-house. This untoward circumstance was likely to have been succeeded by another of a more serious description. As neither he nor some other Swiss gentleman who accompanied him spoke English, they were at a loss how to make themselves understood; or, which was their immediate object, to exchange their foreign for English money. In this dilemma Fletcher, hearing a well dressed Jew speak French, frankly informed him of his difficulty, and at the Jew's request entrusted him with his purse, which contained about ninety pounds. On his return to the inn he told his companions what he had done. With one voice they predicted his loss. "Your money," said they, "is gone. You need never expect to see a crown or a doit of it more. Men are constantly waiting about the doors of these inns, on purpose to take in strangers." The alarm of his more prudent friends proved, however, on this occasion unfounded. The honest Israelite returned in a few minutes, and brought with him the whole of the money.

This business being happily adjusted, his next concern was to find out a suitable tutor. He was accordingly recommended to a Mr. Burchell, of South Mimms, in Hertfordshire, under whose direction he studied the English language and various branches of polite literature. Shortly afterwards he accompanied his tutor, who removed to Hatfield, where his easy and engaging manners gained him the esteem and affection not only of the family in which he lived, but also of various gentlemen in the neighbourhood whom he frequently visited. Mr. Burchell, under whose roof he spent about eighteen months, is said to have loved him as his own son.

Fletcher having by this time made considerable proficiency in the English language, engaged himself as tutor in the family of Mr. Hill, M. P. for Shrewsbury, who resided at Tern Hall, in the parish of Atcham. It is probable that his partiality to England determined him to prolong his stay in this country; and the slender state of his finances, the usual lot of a younger son, induced him to accept of a situation which would enable him to support himself without being burdensome to his family.

CHAPTER II.

HIS CONVERSION—ORDINATION—RELIGIOUS CORRESPONDENCE—SETTLEMENT AT MADELEY.

Mr. Fletcher had manifested, as we have seen, from a very early age, an uncommon reverence for religion. His piety indeed seems somewhat to have declined at college, and perhaps was at a still lower ebb during his short military career: but it appears to have again considerably revived on his arrival in England. He was still, however, a very different character from what he afterwards became, both with respect to the simplicity and correctness of his views, and to the steadiness and efficiency of his religion. His devotion had hitherto been rather a paroxysm than a habit; and his piety a latent principle, which, though readily called into action, not unfrequently remained dormant, or, when employed, was found unequal to its office. Whereas, in after life, prayer was the habitual language of his heart, which, like the consecrated breast-plate of Aaron, steadily reflected the will of heaven; and so powerful were the effects of his religion, as to render him most eminent for those very graces which were in direct opposition to his natural failings. Pride and irritability, he frequently acknowledged, were his setting sins; an avowal which not a little surprised his friends; for those who were most conversant with him uniformly declared that humility and meekness were the most prominent traits in his christian character. "His was a meekness," says Mrs. Fletcher, "which no affronts could move; a humility which loved to be unknown, forgotten and despised."

Without entering into a minute detail, which would tend rather to bewilder than inform, a brief reference to the inquiries, doubts, and fears, which terminated eventually in a peace that never afterwards forsook him, must be at once an interesting and an instructive employment. For this purpose a translation of one of his letters to his brother Henry may be appropriately inserted; a copy of which was kindly presented to the compiler of this narrative by a surviving relative of Mr. Fletcher.

"At eighteen years of age I was a real enthusiast; for, though I lived in the indulgence of many known sins, I considered myself a religious character, because I regularly attended public worship, made long prayers in private, and devoted as much time as I could spare from my studies to reading the prophetic writings, and a few devotional books. My feelings were easily excited, but my heart was rarely affected; and, notwithstanding these deceitful externals, I was destitute of a sincere love to God, and consequently to my neighbour. All my hopes of salvation rested on my prayers, devotions, and a certain habit of saying, 'Lord, I am a great sinner, pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ.' In the mean time I was ignorant of the fall and ruin in which every man is involved, the necessity of a

Redeemer, and the way by which we may be rescued from the fall by receiving Christ with a living faith. I should have been quite confounded if any one had then asked me the following questions taken from the Holy Scriptures: Do you know that you are dead in Adam? Do you live to yourself? Do you live in Christ and for Christ? Does God rule in your heart? Do you experience that peace of God which passeth all understanding? Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit? I repeat it, my dear brother, these questions would have astonished and confounded me, as they must every one who relies on the form of religion, and neglects its power and influence. Blessed be God, who, through his abundant mercy in Jesus Christ, did not then call away my soul when with all my pretended piety I must have had my portion with hypocrites, those clouds without water, those corrupt unfruitful rootless trees, those wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

"My religion, alas! having a different foundation to that which is in Christ, was built merely on the sand; and no sooner did the winds and floods arise than it tottered and fell to ruins. I formed an acquaintance with some Deists, at first with the design of converting them, and afterwards with the pretence of thoroughly examining their sentiments. But my heart, like that of Balaam, was not right with God. He abandoned me, and I enrolled myself in their party. A considerable change took place in my external deportment. *Before* I had a form of religion; and *now* I lost it. But as to the state of my heart, it was precisely the same. I did not remain many weeks in this state; my change was too sudden to be permanent. I sought for a reconciliation with my Saviour; or rather the good Shepherd sought after me, a wandering sheep. Again I became professedly a christian, that is, I resumed a regular attendance at church and the communion, and offered up frequent prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. There were also in my heart some sparks of true love to God, and some germs of genuine faith: but a connexion with worldly characters, and an undue anxiety to promote my secular interests, prevented the growth of these christian graces. Had I now been asked on what I founded my hopes of salvation, I should have replied, that I was not without some religion; that so far from doing harm to any one, I wished well to all the world; that I resisted my passions; that I abstained from pleasures in which I had once needlessly indulged; and that if I was not so religious as some others, it was because such a degree of religion was unnecessary; that heaven might be obtained on easier terms; and that if I perished, the destruction of the generality of christians was inevitable, which I could not believe was consistent with the mercy of God.

"I was in this situation when a dream, in which I am constrained to acknowledge the hand of God, roused me from my security. On a sudden the heavens were darkened, the clouds rolled along in terrific majesty, and a thundering voice like a trumpet which penetrated to the bowels of the earth, exclaimed, Arise, ye dead, and come out of your graves. Instantly the earth and the sea gave up the dead which they contained; and the universe was crowded with living people who appeared to come out of their graves by millions. But what a difference amongst them! Some convulsed with despair endeavoured in vain to hide themselves in their tombs, and cried to the hills to fall on them, and the mountains to cover them from the face of their holy Judge; whilst others rose with seraphic wings above the earth which had been the theatre of their conflicts and their victory. Serenity was painted on their countenances, joy sparkled in their eyes, and dignity was impressed on every feature!

"My astonishment and terror were redoubled when I perceived myself raised up with this innumerable multitude into the vast regions of the air, from whence my affrighted eyes beheld this globe consumed by flames, the heavens on fire, and the dissolving elements ready to pass away. But what did I feel when I beheld the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, in all the splendour of his glory, crowned with the charms of his mercy, and surrounded with the terrors of his justice? Ten thousand thousands went before him, and millions pressed upon his footsteps. All nature was silent: the wicked were convicted and condemned, and the sentence was pronounced,—Bind the tares and the chaff, and cast them into the lake of fire and brimstone! In an instant the air gave way under the feet of those who surrounded me; a yawning gulf received them, and closed itself upon them. At the same time He that sat upon the throne exclaimed, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, ye have suffered with me; come to participate in my glory, inherit the kingdom which I have prepared for you from the foundation of the world!' 'Happy children of God,' I cried, 'you are exalted in triumph with your Redeemer; and my dazzled eyes will soon lose sight of you in the blaze of light which surrounds you. Wretch that I am! what words, what language, can express the horror of my situation.'

"A fixed and severe look from the Judge as he departed, pierced me to the heart; and my anguish and confusion were extreme, when a brilliant personage despatched from the celestial host thus addressed me, —'Slothful servant,' he exclaimed in a stern voice, 'what dost thou here? dost thou presume to follow the Son of God, whom thou hast served merely with thy lips, while thy heart was far from him? Show me the seal of thy salvation, and the earnest of thy redemption; examine thy heart, and see if thou canst discover there a real love to God, and a living faith in his Son? Ask thy conscience what were the motives of thy pretended good works? Dost thou not see that pride and self-love were the source of them? Dost thou not see that the fear of hell rather than the fear of offending God, restrained thee from sin?' After these words he paused; and, regarding me with a compassionate air, seemed to await my reply. But conviction and terror closed my mouth, and he thus resumed his discourse. 'Withhold no longer from God the glory which is due to him. Turn to him with all thy heart, and become a new creature. Watch and pray, was the command of the Son of God: but instead of having done this by working out thy salvation with fear and trembling, thou hast slept the sleep of security. At this very moment dost thou not sleep in that state of lethargy and spiritual death, from which the word of God, the exhortations of his servants, and the strivings of his grace, have not been sufficient to deliver thee? My words will also probably be ineffectual; for he who has not listened to Jesus Christ speaking in the gospel, will not be likely to listen to an angel of the living God. Besides, time is swallowed up in eternity. There is no more place for repentance. Thou hast obstinately refused to glorify God's mercy in Christ Jesus: go, then, slothful servant, and glorify his justice.'

"Having uttered these words, he disappeared; and at the same instant the air gave way under my feet, the abyss began to open, dreadful wailings assailed my ears, and a whirlwind of smoke surrounded me. I considered myself on the brink of inevitable and eternal misery, when the agitation of my mind and body awoke me, of which nothing can equal the horror; and the mere recollection of which still makes me tremble. O how happy I felt on awaking to find that I was still in the land of mercy, and the day of salvation! 'O my God,' I cried, 'grant that this dream may continually influence my sentiments and my conduct. May it prove a powerful stimulus to excite me to prepare continually for the coming of my Great Master."

The generality of dreams, it is readily allowed, are undeserving of attention, being for the most part little more than distorted representations of our waking hours, or physical effects of a disordered stomach. On some occasions, however, and surely the present one may be considered of this description, they have been so apposite to the circumstances of the individual, and have produced such important and permanent effects upon his future conduct, as to justify their being considered as the intimations of a gracious Providence.

"For some days," continued Mr. Fletcher, "I was so dejected and harassed in mind as to be unable to apply myself to any thing. Whilst in this state I attempted to copy some music, when a servant (an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile) entered my chamber. Having noticed my employment, 'I am surprised, Sir,' said he, with a christian boldness, 'that you who know so many things should forget what day this is, and that you should not be aware that the Lord's-day should be sanctified in a very different manner.'

"The sterling character of the man, his deep humility, his zeal for the glory of God, his love to his neighbours, and especially his patience, which enabled him to receive with joy the insults he met with from the whole family, for Christ's sake, and above all, the secret energy which accompanied his words, deeply affected me, and convinced me more than ever of my real state. I was convinced, as it had been told me in my dream, that I was not renewed in the spirit of my mind, that I was not conformed to the image of God, and that without this the death of Christ would be of no avail for my salvation."

This discovery was attended with the most important results. Feeling his deficiency, he determined to make serious inquiries: he sought the society and advice of christian friends, compared his own state of mind and hopes of salvation with the Scriptures, and prayed with much importunity that he might not be deceived in so momentous an investigation. At times indeed he could not restrain some risings of indignation at the idea of his being still imperfectly acquainted with the nature of religion. "Is it possible," he would say, "that I, who have always been accounted so religious, who have made divinity my study, and received from the learned professors of Geneva a prize for the best essay on christian godliness;—is it possible that I should yet be ignorant of the subject?" But the more he examined himself, the more he was compelled to acknowledge that this was really the case. At the same time, an increasing sense of the evil of sin and of the depravity of his nature, convinced him that it was impossible to obtain reconciliation with God upon any plea of human merit. His prayer hence was,—"Save me, Lord, as a brand snatched out of the fire; give me justifying faith in thy blood; cleanse me from my sins, for Satan will surely reign over me until Thou shalt take me into thy hand." Such were the devout and earnest expressions of this sincere seeker after truth, until at length, to adopt the appropriate language of a modern prelate, he obtained that "lively faith, which, through the grace of God, will incite men to do all which they can do; whilst it teaches them to rely upon nothing which they have done."*

The feelings of Mr. Fletcher were now in unison with those of the Psalmist:—"O Lord, truly I am thy servant, Thou hast loosed my bonds;" or rather, with those of the Apostle,—"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Henceforth his religion equally influenced his sentiments, and extended to his conduct; for Him, whom he had found as a Saviour, he determined to follow as a Guide. A host of witnesses could testify, that from this period he continued to walk worthy of his high vocation, "growing in grace, and adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour."

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*Bishop Law's sermon on the Scriptural Doctrine of Man's Salvation.

The spirit of religion is a social spirit. It opens the heart of its possessor, and renders him anxious that others should participate in his own enjoyments. A few extracts from some letters which Mr. Fletcher wrote about this time to one of his brothers will exemplify this remark, and afford a further insight into his present state of mind.—"How long," said he, "have I placed my happiness in mere chimeras! How often have I grounded my vain hopes upon imaginary foundations! I have been constantly employed in framing designs for my own felicity: but my disappointments have been as frequent and various as my projects. In the midst of my idle reveries how often have I said to myself, 'Drag thy weary feet but to the summit of yonder eminence, a situation beyond which the world has nothing to present more adequate to thy wishes; and there thou shalt sit down in a state of repose.' On my arrival, however, at the spot proposed, a sad discovery has taken place: the whole scene has appeared more barren than the valley I had quitted, and the point of happiness which I lately imagined it possible to have touched with my finger has presented itself at a greater distance than ever.

"If hitherto, my dear brother, you have beguiled yourself with prospects of the same visionary nature, never expect to be more successful in your future pursuits. One labour will only succeed another, making way for continual discontent and chagrin. Open your heart, and there you will discover the source of that painful inquietude to which, by your own confession, you have been long a prey; examine its secret recesses, and you will be convinced that man is an apostate being, who can never become truly happy till he is cast, as it were, into a new mould, and created a second time. For my own part, when I first began to know myself, I endeavoured to throw a palliating disguise over the wretchedness of my condition: but the impression it had already made upon my heart was too deep to be erased. It was to no purpose that I reminded myself of the morality of my conduct. It was in vain, that I recollected the many encomiums that had been passed upon my early piety and virtue. And it was of little avail, that I sought to cast a mist before my eyes, by reasonings like these. If conversion implies a total change,—who has been converted in these days? Why dost thou imagine thyself worse than thou really art? Thou art a believer in God, and in Christ; thou art a christian; thou hast injured no person; thou art neither a drunkard nor an adulterer; thou hast discharged thy duties, not only in a general way, but with more than ordinary exactness; thou art a strict attendant at church; thou art accustomed to pray more regularly than others, and frequently with a good degree of fervour. Make thyself perfectly easy. Moreover, Jesus Christ has suffered for thy sins, and his merit will supply every thing that is lacking on thy part.

"It was by reasonings of this nature, that I endeavoured to conceal from myself the deplorable state of my heart: and I am ashamed, my dear brother, I repeat it, I am ashamed that I suffered myself so long to be deluded by the artifices of Satan, and the devices of my own heart. God himself has invited me; a cloud of apostles, prophets, and martyrs, have exhorted me; and my conscience, animated by those sparks of grace which are latent in every breast, has urged me to enter in at the strait gate: but, notwithstanding all this, a subtle tempter, a deluding world, and a deceived heart, have constantly turned the balance in favour of the broad way for above these twenty years. I have passed the most lovely part of my life in the service of these tyrannical masters, and am ready to declare in the face of the universe that all my reward has consisted in disquietude and remorse. Happy had I been if I had listened to the earliest invitations of grace, and broken their iron yoke from off my neck."

In another letter to the same brother he adds, "Every day I make fresh discoveries in the holy Scriptures. I will not enter into detail, but will merely say that this is the sum of them; that religion consists in loving God above all things; that real love to God can have no other foundation than that of a living faith in Jesus Christ; and that this faith can have no firm root except in a broken heart, penetrated and melted down (if I may so express myself) by a feeling of its own corruption, and thus prepared for the reception of gracious impressions. This is what is intended by the word in the original which we badly translate *repentance.* But *the grace* of God alone can enable us to enter into these truths, and to realize the experience of a humble heart, earnestly seeking after, and praying for, the influence of the Spirit. Where this grace is in operation, fruit will necessarily be produced; whereas if the tree is barren, faith in Christ is not its root. In vain will its verdant leaves be marked with the name of the Redeemer, in vain will his device be graven on every part of its bark, in vain will it cast forth a pleasant shade for those who rest under its branches. If it bear not good fruit, it will be cut down, and cast into the fire. This, my dear brother, is my religion, and I am persuaded was the religion of the apostles also. It is from this source that, through the grace of God, will flow the various actions of my life. Weigh the whole in the balance of the *sanctuary*, and see if there is any thing defective in my sentiments.

"It only remains for me to answer a few questions, which you probably may propose to me. 'What,' you may inquire, 'are the effects of the change you have experienced? Do you consider yourself abundantly better than others? Can you truly declare that you have triumphed over all your failings? And do you think soon to arrive at perfection?' With respect to the first question, I answer I make no comparisons. As to perfection, I do not believe it is attainable in this world. And with regard to my failings, and innumerable sins, I bless God, through Jesus Christ, that his grace has in part destroyed those evils which closed the way to heaven; and as to those *I still feel*, at least I know them, I sincerely lament them, I continually fight against them, and am assured that the sins which, alas, I still commit are forgiven for my Redeemer's sake.

"God grant, my dear brother, that the gospel of Christ may not be foolishness or a stumbling-block to you. Saint Paul again and again declares that the philosophers, and those who were wise in their own eyes, regarded the grace of God as a subject beneath their reason and attention. And yet the first, I might almost say the only qualification God requires in us, is a profound humility of heart, and a child-like docility of disposition. If with such a state of mind you read and compare the Scriptures, you will soon be convinced that these things are really so, and this will necessarily influence your conduct. Then indeed we shall truly be brothers in Christ, and shall excite each other by our mutual exhortations and prayers to run with patience and constancy in our course even to the end, where Christ has placed crowns of glory for us."

Shortly after this period Mr. Fletcher's attention was again directed to the work of the ministry: but, being diffident of his qualifications for so weighty an office, two years elapsed previous to his ordination. "Before," says he, "I was afraid: but now I tremble to meddle with holy things. Yet from time to time I feel strong desires to cast myself and my inability on the Lord, knowing that he can help me, and show His strength in my weakness."

Things were in this state when a living, with a prospect of early presentation, was offered him by his patron. But he declined accepting it, as he then conceived that if he ever went into orders, he should be better qualified to preach in his native country, and in his own tongue. "I am in suspense," he continues: "on one side, whenever I feel any degree of the love of God and man, my heart tells me I must try; on the other, I so plainly see my want of gifts, and especially of that soul of all the labours of a minister, LOVE, *continual, universal, ardent,* LOVE; that my confidence disappears, and I accuse myself of pride in daring to entertain the desire of one day supporting the ark of God."

In the mean time he diligently prosecuted those studies which are generally regarded as preparatory to holy orders, and endeavoured to make himself useful in a private station. He instructed the servants in Mr. Hill's family, where he constantly resided, and permitted some who were the best disposed occasionally to join him in his private devotions. He also visited any of the poor of the neighbourhood, who were sick; and, when no other person could be procured, cheerfully performed the meanest offices for them. A person who was acquainted with him at this period relates, that it was his custom after the service on a Sunday, to take a solitary walk by the Severn side, for the purpose of meditation and prayer; and refers with transport to his being sometimes privileged to accompany Mr. Fletcher on these occasions. And another man, who then resided in the village, speaks with the same delight of the spirituality of his conversation, the sweetness of his temper, and the fervour of his piety. "To those who perfectly knew him in this state of retirement," says Mr. Gilpin, "he appeared as a polished shaft, hid indeed for a season in the quiver of his Lord; yet ready for immediate service, and prepared to fly in any appointed direction."

Having manifested some tendency to consumption, Mr. Fletcher now lived upon vegetable diet; and indeed, for some time, on milk and water, and bread. This excessive abstemiousness, which appears at first to have been adopted for the preservation of his health, was for some years after continued from choice. He also sat up two whole nights in the week for the pupose of reading, prayer, and meditation; and on other nights never allowed himself to sleep so long as he could keep up his attention to the book before him. These imprudent excesses are supposed to have given the first shock to his constitution, and to have laid the foundation of infirmities which accompanied him to the grave. As there is little danger in our day, of ascetic courses becoming popular, it is merely necessary to say, that Mr. Fletcher never enjoined them upon others; and that in after-life he acknowledged his own error in adopting them, though he was not aware at the time that his health suffered any injury from them.

In the year 1756 he lost his father, for whom he entertained a most affectionate regard. "I lately heard," says he, "that my aged father is gone the way of all flesh: but the glorious circumstances of his death make me ample amends for the sorrow which I felt. For some years I have written to him with as much freedom as I could have done to a son, though not with so much effect as I wished: but last spring God visited him with a severe illness, which brought him to himself; and, after a deep repentance, he died in the full assurance of faith. This has put several of my friends on thinking seriously, which gives me great cause for thankfulness."

For some time past Mr. Fletcher had received several promises of preferment in the Church: but they served rather to retard than hasten his entrance into it. Having a sacrifice to make, and not a fortune to secure, he was fearful lest his intentions should be debased by views of an interested nature. At length his humble reluctance being overcome, he solemnly determined to offer himself as a candidate for holy orders in the English Church; and was accordingly ordained deacon at the chapel royal, St. James', on the 6th of March, 1757, and priest on the following Sunday, by the Bishop of Bangor. As he had at present no stated cure, after having preached a few times to some French refugees in his own language, and also in two of the chapels belonging to Mr. Wesley, with whom he had long been intimately acquainted, he returned with his pupils into Shropshire. "I set out," says he, "in two days for the country. May I be faithful; harmless as a dove, wise as a serpent, and bold as a lion, for the common cause."

He now occasionally preached in some of the neighbouring churches. Atcham, Wroxeter, the abby church in Shrewsbury, and St. Alkmond's in the same town, were the scenes of his gratuitous services. But the decided tone of his preaching, in connexion with the natural fervour of the Swiss, which does not exactly comport with our more phlegmatic notions of pulpit eloquence, rendered him far from popular. Indeed, at present, neither his talents nor his virtues appear to have been duly appreciated, beyond the immediate circle of his friends. To a person who expressed some regret that he had not more opportunities for public labour, Mr. Fletcher replied, with his characteristic piety, "The will of God be done: I am in His hands. If He do not call me to so much public duty, I have the more time for study, prayer, and praise."

Having occasion during the following spring to accompany his pupils to London, he determined to avail himself of that opportunity to call upon the Rev. John Berridge, the late excellent vicar of Everton. He accordingly introduced himself as a raw convert, who had taken the liberty to wait on him for the benefit of his instruction and advice. From his accent and manners Mr. Berridge perceived that he was a foreigner, and asked him what countryman he was. "A Swiss, from the canton of Bern," was the reply. "From Bern! then, probably, you can give me some account of a young countryman of your's, one John Fletcher, who has lately preached a few times for the Mr. Wesleys, and of whose talents, learning, and piety, they both speak in terms of high eulogy. Do you know him?" "Yes, Sir, I know him intimately; and, did those gentlemen know him as well, they would not speak of him in such terms, for which he is more obliged to their partial friendship than to his own merits." "You surprise me," said Mr. Berridge, "in speaking so coldly of a countryman, in whose praise they are so warm." "I have the best reason," he rejoined, "for speaking of him as I do,—I am John Fletcher." "If you are John Fletcher," replied his host, "you must do me the favour to take my pulpit to-morrow; and when we are better acquainted, without implicitly receiving your statement, or that of your friends, I shall be able to judge for myself." Thus commenced an intimacy with Mr. Berridge, which controversy could not afterward destroy.

Letters written on the spur of the occasion, however interesting they may be to the individuals to whom they were originally sent, are rarely adapted for the public eye. From a man, however, of Mr. Fletcher's spirit, we may always expect to find something which will make its way directly to the heart, and excite feelings of interest in the mind of every truly religious person. Two or three extracts from his letters at this period, while they show his strong desire of being useful to the several individuals he addressed, will at the same time bring us more intimately acquainted with the secret feelings of his own mind.

In a letter addressed to a Mrs. Glynne of Shrewsbury, he writes as follows:—" As it is never too late to do what multiplicity of business, rather than forgetfulness, has forced us to defer, I am not ashamed, though after some months, to use the liberty you gave me, to inquire after the welfare of your soul; and that so much the more, as I am conscious I have not forgotten you at the throne of grace. O may my petitions have reached heaven, and forced from thence at least some drops of those spiritual showers of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost which I implore for you. I have often thought of you, Madam, while reading the letters of a lady (Mrs. Lefevre) who was a christian, and an eminent christian. The reproach of Christ was her crown of rejoicing, his cross her continual support, his followers her nearest companions, his example the pattern of her conversation. Each of her letters may be a model for christian correspondents, by the simplicity, edification, and love, they breathe in every line. When shall I write as she did? When my heart shall be as full of the love of God as her's was. May the Lord enable you to walk in her steps; and grant me to see you shining among the humble loving Marys of this age, as she did but a few months ago. Her God is our God: the same spirit that animated her is waiting at the door of our hearts to cleanse them and fill them with his consolations. Why then should we give way to despondency; and refuse to cherish that lively hope, which if any one has, 'he will purify himself even as God is pure.'"

To another lady, the Hon. Mrs. ——, he writes thus:—"To a believer Jesus is alone the desirable, the everlasting distinction and honour of men. All other advantages, though now so proudly extolled, so vehemently coveted, are like the down on the thistle, blown away in a moment, and never secure to the possessor. But amidst all the possible changes of life, Christ is a rock. To see him by faith, to lay hold on, to rely, to live upon him, this is the refuge from the storm, the shadow from the heat. I always feel my heart refreshed when I am talking or thinking of Jesus. It is a feast to my sinful soul, when I am meditating on the glories which compose his blessed name. O Thou Light of the world, enlighten my soul! Teach me to know more of thine infinite and unsearchable riches, that I may love Thee with an increasing love, and serve thee with an increasing zeal, till Thou bringest me to glory."

In another letter written at this time, a passage occurs, which shows in a striking manner that lowly sense of himself which was so characteristic of this holy man. "If I did not write to you before, it was not that I wanted a remembrancer within, but rather an encourager without. There is generally upon my heart such a sense of my unworthiness, that I sometimes dare hardly open my mouth before a child of God."

To another christian friend he speaks upon the same point, and in terms equally characteristic of his general feelings. "A few days ago the Lord gave me two or three lessons on the subject I so greatly need,—poverty of spirit. I could then say, what Gregory Lopez was enabled to say at all times,—'There is no man of whom I have not a better opinion than of myself.' If ever I am humble and patient, if ever I enjoy solid peace of mind, it must be in this very spirit. Ah! why do I not actually find these virtues? Because I am filled with self-sufficiency, and am possessed by that self-esteem which blinds me and hinders me from doing justice to my own demerits. O! pray that the Spirit of Jesus may remove these scales from my eyes for ever, and compel me to retire into my own nothingness."

During this and the following year, Mr. Fletcher's time was divided between London and Tern-Hall. At the opening of Parliament, he accompanied his pupils to the metropolis, and on its close he returned with them into Shropshire. In both places his preaching and talents became gradually more appreciated. In the country fresh churches were opened for his reception; and in town he was constantly and most acceptably employed. Still, however, he had no permanent charge, though during the close of the summer of 1759, he was frequently engaged in performing the duty at Madeley, where he contracted an affection for the people, which, notwithstanding the various trials he experienced from them, continued unabated till his death.

One day during the following year, his patron with a joyful countenance informed him that the living of Dunham, in Cheshire, then vacant, was at his service. "The parish," he continued, "is small, the duty light, the income good, (400*l.* per annum,) and it is situated in a fine healthy sporting country." After thanking Mr. Hill most cordially for his kindness, Mr. Fletcher added, "Alas! Sir, Dunham will not suit me; there is too much money, and too little labour." "Few clergymen make such objections," said Mr. Hill; "it is a pity to decline such a living, as I do not know that I can find you another. What shall we do? Would you like Madeley?" "That, Sir, would be the very place for me." "My object, Mr. Fletcher, is to make you comfortable in your own way. If you prefer Madeley, I shall find no difficulty in persuading Chambers, the present vicar, to exchange it for Dunham, which is worth more than twice as much." In this way he was appointed to the living of Madeley, with which he was so perfectly satisfied, that he never afterwards would accept of any other preferment. He was also now disengaged from the charge of his pupils, as just at this period they were sent to the University. The elder of them died about the time of his coming of age. The younger first represented the town of Shrewsbury, afterwards the county of Salop; and at length took his seat in the house of peers, as Baron Berwick of Attingham house, the name which is now given to the place formerly called Tern Hall. Attingham house is a handsome modern structure on the right hand of the turnpike road, going from Wellington to Shrewsbury; and is erected near the confluence of the Tern and the Severn.

Nothing can now be accurately ascertained with regard to Mr. Fletcher's conduct as a tutor. His literary attainments well qualified him for the office; and his religious principles, we may reasonably infer, would insure a faithful attention to it. He appears to have been hardly ever separated from his pupils. When they travelled, he accompanied them; and when they were at home, he also was stationary. His long continuance at Tern Hall was a proof that he was satisfied with his situation; while the kind anxiety of his patron to procure him preferment, and a subsequent request that he would attend his son on a tour to the continent,* afford a presumptive evidence that Mr. Hill was equally satisfied with the tutor.

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*In a letter dated Madeley, April 27, 1761, he says, "Mr. Hill has written me a very obliging letter to engage me to accompany the eldest of my pupils to Switzerland; and, if I had any other country than the place where I am, I should perhaps have been tempted to go. At present, however, I have no temptation that way; and I have declined the offer as politely as I could."

CHAPTER III.

HIS MANNER OF PREACHING—MINISTERIAL LABOURS—DEVOTIONAL SPIRIT.

Madeley is a populous and picturesque village in the liberties of Wenlock Franchise, and is separated from Broseley by the Severn. It has long been celebrated for its extensive collieries and iron-works, and more recently for an excellent china manufactory. Previous to Mr. Fletcher's presentation to the living, its inhabitants, with some honourable exceptions, were notorious for their ignorance and impiety. They openly profaned the Sabbath, treated the most holy things with contempt, disregarded the restraints of decency, and ridiculed the very name of religion. It is a reproach to England that such a description is but too frequently applicable to places where mines and manufactories have collected together a crowded population. In this benighted village, Fletcher stood forth as a preacher of righteousness; and, during the space of twenty-five years, appeared as a burning and shining light.

As Madeley was the place of his choice, so also it was one for which he was peculiarly qualified. He foresaw the difficulties and trials of his situation: but, equally regardless of labour or reproach, he cheerfully entered upon his duty with a zeal proportioned to the arduous nature of his charge. For several months after his ordination he had been in the habit of generally reading his sermons: but being by this time fully acquainted with the English language, he trusted to his extemporary powers, after having sketched out for his private meditation some of the particulars of his intended discourse. This latter mode of preaching is alike preferable to that servile repetition of a sermon which so generally prevails in Switzerland, and to that phlegmatic reading of a composition which has still so many advocates in the English Church. Upon a person of lively feelings, and ready utterance, a written sermon operates like a spell, from which he cannot depart; his invention sleeping, while his utterance follows his eye. Whereas when he has nothing before him except the audience whom he is addressing, his judgment and imagination, as well as his memory, are called forth. Such parts are omitted as would come feebly from the tongue, or fall heavily upon the ear; and their place happily supplied by matter newly laid-in in the course of study, or fresh from the feelings of the moment.*

The deep attention of Mr. Fletcher had paid to the recesses of his own heart enabled him to form no inadequate idea of the internal feelings of others. Hence he knew when to probe, and when to heal; when to depress, and when to encourage: and no person's case was so perplexed or desperate, but he was in some measure prepared to explain and relieve it. A happy talent too which he possessed, of selecting

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* See Southey's Life of Wesley.

The preparatory notes to one of Mr. Fletcher's sermons are here subjoined. If, in their present form, they appear somewhat desultory, the observant reader will perceive that they contain materials which, when expanded by the impassioned eloquence and impressive delivery of the preacher, would arrest the attention of the most indifferent hearer.

Luke xii. 20.—*Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.*

Let us consider—

I. Why the person mentioned in the text is called a fool.

He was rich in this world; but neglected being rich towards God, rich in grace.

He was perplexed about the manner of bestowing his goods, when he had numbers of poor neighbours to whom he might have given the superfluity of them.

He determined to pull down his barns and build greater, instead of breaking off his sins, and building the hopes of his salvation on the Rock of ages.

He promised himself a long life; as if he had a lease of it signed by his heavenly Lord.

He said to his soul, "Take thine ease," instead of determining to work out his salvation with fear and trembling.

II. The suddenness of the summons, and the privations that would attend it,—"This night shall thy soul be required of thee." Not so much as to-morrow is allowed him to dispose of those goods which were laid up for many years. He must immediately part with all.

All his moveable goods,—for a winding-sheet.

All his landed estate,—for a grave.

All his barns and houses,—for a coffin.

His soul, it is to be feared.

III. The particular time of its execution.—This *night*, &c. This seems to imply,—

Darkness and horror, which chiefly belong to the night. Of this we have striking illustrations in the destruction of the first-born of the Egyptians, and of Sennacherib's army.

Drowsiness and carnal security, illustrated by the parable of the foolish virgins.

at a moment the most appropriate passages of Scripture, clothed his words with a divine authority, and enabled him to speak as one who was conscious of his high credentials.

"There was an energy in his preaching," says Mr. Gilpin, "that was irresistible. His subjects, his language, his gestures, the tone of his voice, and the turn of his countenance, all conspired to fix the atten-

Sadness, in opposition to those nights which he had perhaps spent in debauchery and vain diversions.

Sin, and ignorance of the ways of God, which are called "darkness and night," "works of darkness," &c.

IV. The nature and value of the soul to be required.

How excellent! spiritual, immortal, endued with the most glorious faculties, made after the image of God.

How precious! Its value may be estimated from the admirable texture of the body, which is only the casket where that jewel is placed.

From the pains taken to adorn and repair the body, whose value depends only on the jewel it contains.

From the testimony of Christ, who prefers one soul to the whole material creation. Matt. xvi. 26.

V. Who will require the soul of the rich man?

Not Christ, as a Saviour; for in that capacity He hath nothing to do with dying unbelievers.

Nor good angels; they carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom, but the rich man found his way to the flames without them.

Nor departed saints; who neither can nor will meddle with unregenerate souls. Luke xvi.

Who then? *Some unforeseen accident or distemper.*

Death, who delivers the wicked into the hands of the tormentors.

Evil spirits,—the ministers of Divine justice.

VI. The force of the expression,—*Thy soul* shall be required *of thee.*—The man whose soul is required may say, May not that of some poor pining Lazarus be required first? No. *Thy* soul.

May not that of an old Simeon, who longs to depart in peace, be allowed to die first? No,—thy hour is come; of *thee* is *thy* soul required.

May not some of my servants or weeping friends die first? No, cries the stern messenger; my errand is to *thee.*

tion, and affect the heart. Without aiming at sublimity, he was truly sublime; and uncommonly eloquent, without affecting the orator. He was wondrously skilled in adapting himself to the different capacities and conditions of his hearers. He could stoop to the illiterate, and rise with the learned; he had incontrovertible arguments for the skeptic, and powerful persuasives for the listless believer; he had sharp remonstrance for the obstinate, and strong consolation for the mourner. To hear him without admiration, was impossible; without profit, improbable. The unthinking went from his presence under the influence of serious impressions, and the obdurate with kindled relentings." Mr. Wesley describes him as superior to Whitfield in his qualifications for a public preacher. "Instead of being confined," says he, "to a country village, he ought to have shone in every corner of our land. He was full as much called to sound an alarm through all the nation as Mr. Whitfield himself; nay, abundantly more so, seeing he was much better qualified for that important work. He had a more striking person, an equally winning address, together with a richer flow of fancy, a stronger understanding, a far greater treasure of learning both in languages, philosophy, philology, and divinity; and above all, (which I can speak with fuller assurance, because I had a thorough knowledge both of one and the other,) a more deep and constant communion with the Father, and with the Son Jesus Christ. And yet let not any one imagine, that I depreciate Mr. Whitfield, or undervalue the grace of God, and the extraordinary gifts, which his great

Master vouchsafed unto him. I believe he was highly favoured of God; yea, that he was one of the most eminent ministers, that has appeared in England, or perhaps in the world, during the present century. Yet, I must own, I have known many fully equal to Mr. Whitfield, both in holy tempers and holiness of conversation: but one equal herein to Mr. Fletcher, I have not known; no, not in a life of fourscore years." Another friend of his adds, "I would rather have heard one sermon from Mr. Fletcher *viva voce,* than have read a volume of his works. His words were clothed with power, and entered with effect. His writings were arrayed in all the garb of human literature. But his living word soared an eagle's flight above humanity. In short, his preaching was apostolic; while his writings, though enlightened, are but human."

After due allowance for the partiality of friendship, and the figurative and high-wrought strain of some of these expressions, that man's preaching must be allowed to have been of no ordinary stamp, which elicited such descriptions; and to these many other testimonies might be added of its transcendent excellency.

But while we admire his very superior powers as a preacher, it may not be uninteresting to point out the grand topic which, like a rich vein of precious ore, ran through his discourses, and gave to them their peculiar excellence. This topic was the grace and mercy of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. However quick, penetrating, and powerful, his word in general was, he was accustomed to place his chief glory and pleasure in spreading abroad the benedictions of the gospel. He considered the ministration of mercy as abundantly more glorious than that of condemnation, and was disposed to magnify it as such on all occasions. Experiencing in his own heart its inestimable effects, he was anxious that all others should be partakers of his joy. This therefore was the grand point upon which he delighted to dwell, and upon which he had astonishing things to offer. His disposition to universal benevolence was conspicuous through the whole of his public ministrations; but especially so in the latter years of his life, when his heart was as a vessel running over with Christian charity.

"O the depth," he exclaimed, "of the mystery of faith! O the breadth, the length, the height, of the love of Christ! All his stupendous humiliation from his Father's bosom, through the virgin's womb to the accursed tree; all his astonishing exaltation, from the dust of the grave, and the sorrows of hell, to the joys of heaven and the highest throne of glory; all this immense progress of incarnate love—all, all is ours. His mysterious incarnation re-unites and endears us to God; his natural birth procures our spiritual regeneration; his unspotted life restores us to a blissful immortality; his bitter agony gives us a calm repose; his perfect obedience is our title to endless felicity; his full atonement purchases our free justification; his cruel death is the spring of immortal life; his grave, the gate of heaven; his resurrection, the pledge of glory; his ascension, the triumph of our souls; his sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high, the earnest of our future coronation and exalted felicity;

and his prevailing intercession, the inexhaustible fountain of all our blessings.

"Come then, conscious sinner, come to the feast of pardoning love; taste with us, that the Lord is gracious. Let not a false humility detain thee, under pretence, that 'thou art not yet humbled and broken enough for sin.' Alas! who can humble thee but Jesus, that says, *Without me ye can do nothing?* And how canst thou be broken, but by *falling upon this chief corner stone?* If humiliation and contrition are parts of the salvation which he merited for thee, is it not the quintessence of self-righteousness to attempt to attain them without him? Away then, for ever away, with such a dangerous excuse.

"Christ is a Redeemer most eminently fitted, a Saviour most completely qualified, to restore corrupt, guilty apostate mankind; the vilest of the vile, the foulest of the foul not excepted. He is almighty; and therefore perfectly able to restore lapsed powers, root up inveterate habits, and implant heavenly tempers. He is love itself, compassionate, merciful, pardoning love, become incarnate for thee. And shall he, that spared not his own life, but delivered himself up for us all—shall he not with his own blood also freely give us all things?

"See, PARDON FOR LOST SINNERS is written, with pointed steel and streaming blood, on his pierced hands and feet. The double flood issuing from his wounded side more than seals the dear-bought blessing. The handwriting against us is nailed to his cross, and blotted out with his precious blood. His open arms invite, draw, and welcome returning prodigals;

and there encircled, the worst of sinners may find a safe and delightful retreat, a real and present heaven. Fly, then, miserable sinner,—if thy flesh is not brass, and thou canst not dwell with everlasting burnings, fly for shelter to the bloody cross of Jesus. There thou wilt meet him, who was, and is, and is to come, Immanuel, God with us, who appeared as the Son of man, to make his soul an offering for sin, for *thy* sin; and save thy life from destruction, by losing his own in pangs, which made the sun turn pale, shook the earth, and caused the shattered graves to give up their dead."

Had Mr. Fletcher even confined his public labours to the appointed services of the Sabbath, they would still have been highly beneficial. But a desire to become more extensively useful induced him during the week to expound the Scriptures in the different hamlets in his parish, in which numbers of persons resided, who from age, distance, or indifference to religion, seldom or never attended public worship. These gratuitous services were after a time frequented by persons from adjacent parts; some of whom being seriously impressed with the truths delivered, felt, as might be expected, an attachment to the preacher, and a desire that their neighbours might participate in the same privileges. He accordingly accepted of invitations to preach in other parishes, until at length, without omitting his stated services at home, he regularly preached at places eight, ten, or sixteen miles off, though he could rarely reach his own home till after midnight.

Such a course of itinerancy, though now universally disapproved of by the clergy of the Establishment, was far from being a novel practice in England. "The Saxon bishops," says Mr. Southey, "used to travel through their dioceses; and where there were no churches, preach in the open air. At the beginning of our Reformation preachers were sent to itinerate in those counties where they were most needed; for thus it was thought they would be more extensively useful, than if they were fixed upon particular cures. Four of Edward the Sixth's chaplains were thus employed, of whom John Knox was one; and in the course of his rounds he frequently preached every day in the week. At that time it was designed that there should be in every diocese some persons who should take their circuit, and preach like Evangelists, as some of the favourers of the Reformation called them. Unhappy circumstances frustrated this among other good intentions of the fathers of our Church: but it was practised with great efficacy in a part of England, where it was greatly wanted, by Bernard Gilpin, one of the most apostolical men that later ages have produced."

Some clergymen, who have been eminent for their public exertions, have been found remiss in other departments of their ministerial labour. But Mr. Fletcher was equally sedulous and effective in every office of the ministry, and particularly exemplary in his pastoral visits. He studied how best to go about doing good. In his daily walks through the parish there was hardly an individual, male or female, escaped his notice; and he had for each "a word in season," adapted to his character, circumstances, and capacity. No office of humanity, however humble, mean, disgusting, or perilous, did he shun. Whole nights he waited on the humblest and most infectious sick; when none but himself had humanity, courage, or piety, to perform the offices of a nurse, a pastor, or a christian friend. Hence if he heard the knocker in the coldest winter night, his window was instantly opened; and when he understood either that some one was hurt in the pits, or that a neighbour was likely to die, no consideration was ever paid to the darkness of the night, or the severity of the weather: but this answer was uniformly given, "I will attend you immediately." On these occasions he administered advice with fidelity and affection according to the circumstances of his people, delivering the promises of the gospel to those whom he considered prepared for them, and earnestly praying for others that the mercy of God might be manifested to them, though it should be at the eleventh hour.

His method of communicating instruction and comfort to the sick may be collected from the following advice which he gave to a young lady; who was then resident in France for the benefit of her health.

"The poor account your father has brought us of your health, and his apprehension of not seeing you any more before that solemn day when all people, nations, and tongues, shall stand together at the bar of God, make me venture (together with my love for you) to send you a few lines; and my earnest prayer to God is that they may be blessed to your soul.

"First, then, my dear friend, let me beseech you not to flatter yourself with the hopes of living long here on earth. These hopes fill us with worldly thoughts, and make us backward to prepare for our change. To see the bridge of life cut off behind us, and to have done with all the thoughts of repairing it to go back into the world, has a natural tendency to make us venture forward to the foot of the cross.

"Secondly, reflect that though your earthly father loves you much;—witness the hundreds of miles he has gone for the bare prospect of your health;—yet, your heavenly Father loves you a thousand times better: and He is all wisdom, as well as all goodness. Allow, then, such a loving gracious Father to choose for you; and, if he chooses death, acquiesce, and say, as you can, Good is the will of the Lord; his choice must be best.

"Thirdly, try to get nearer to the dear Redeemer. By his atoning blood, by his harmless life, and painful death, he has satisfied all the demands of the law and justice of God; by his resurrection he asserted the full discharge of all our spiritual debts; by his ascension into heaven, where he has gone to prepare us a place, he has opened a way to endless glory. By his powerful intercession and the merits of his blood, which plead continually for us, he keeps that way open.

"Fourthly, when you have considered your lost state, as a sinner by nature, together with the greatness, the fulness, the freeness, and the suitableness, of Christ's salvation; be not afraid to venture upon and trust in him. Cast yourself on him in frequent acts of reliance, and stay your soul on him by means of his promises. Pray much for faith: and be not afraid of accepting, using, and thanking God for a little. The smoking flax he will not quench; pray only that he would blow it up into a flame of light and love.

"Fifthly, beware of impatience, repining, and peevishness, which are the sins of sick people. Be gentle, easy to be pleased, and resigned as the bleeding Lamb of God. Wrong tempers indulged grieve, if they do not quench the Spirit.

"Sixthly, do not repine at being in a strange country, far from your friends; and if your going to France does not answer the end proposed to your body, it will answer a spiritual end to your soul. God suffers the broken reeds of your acquaintance to be out of your reach, that you may not catch at them; and that you may at once cast your lonesome soul on the bosom of Him who fills heaven and earth.

"Many pray earnestly for you, that you may acquit yourself, living or dying, in ease or in pain, as a wise virgin, and as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. But above all, Jesus, the Captain of your salvation, and the High Priest of your profession, intercedes mightily for you. To his pity, love and power, I recommend you. May he bless you, my dear friend; lift up the light of his countenance upon you; and give you peace, and courage, and repentance, and faith and hope, and patient love, both now and evermore."

Such admirable advice, so seasonably, and so affectionately administered, could scarcely fail to be accompanied with a blessing.

Some time after he wrote thus to Mr. Ireland, the father of the young lady:—"Uncertain as I am whether your daughter be yet alive, or whether the Lord hath called her from this vale of darkness and tears, I know not what to say to you on the subject, but this,—that our heavenly Father appoints all things for the best. If her days of suffering are prolonged, it is to honour her with a conformity to the crucified Jesus; if they are shortened, she will have drunk all her cup of affliction; and I flatter myself that she has found at the bottom of it not the bitterness and the gall of her sins, but the honey and wine of our divine Saviour's righteousness, and the consolations of his Spirit.

"I had lately some views of death, and it appeared to me in the most brilliant colours. What is it to die, but to open our eyes after the disagreeable dream of this life; after the black sleep in which we are buried in this earth? It is to break the prison of corruptible flesh and blood into which sin has cast us; to draw aside the curtain; to cast off the material veil which prevents us from seeing the Supreme Beauty and Goodness face to face. It is to quit our polluted and tattered raiment to be invested with robes of honour and glory; and to behold the Sun of righteousness in brightness, without an interposing cloud. O my dear friend, how lovely is death, when we look at it in Jesus Christ! To die is one of the greatest privileges of the christian.

"If Miss Ireland is still living, tell her a thousand times that Jesus is the resurrection and the life; that he hath vanquished and disarmed death; that he hath brought life and immortality to light; and that all things are ours, whether life or death, eternity or time. These are the great truths upon which she ought to risk, or rather to repose, her soul with full assurance. Every thing is shadow and a lie in comparison of the reality of the Gospel. If your daughter is dead, believe in Jesus, and you shall find her again in Him, who fills all in all, who encircles the material and spiritual world in his arms,—in the immense bosom of his Divinity.

"I have not time to write to Mrs. Ireland: but I entreat her to keep her promise, and to inform me what victories she has gained over the world, the flesh, and sin. Surely, when a daughter is dead, or dying, it is high time for a father and a mother to die to all things below, and aspire in good earnest to that eternal life which God has given us in Christ Jesus."

But Mr. Fletcher's attention, as has been already observed, was not confined to the sick. Like Ignatius, the venerable bishop of Antioch, he appears to have been acquainted with almost every individual of his flock, and to have watched over them with more than paternal tenderness. He called upon them in their different families, and diligently taught them from house to house; taking especial care to adapt the mode, as well as the matter, of his instructions, to the age, and rank, and character, of each individual. In some of these pastoral visits a whole family has burst into tears, and with one accord expressed their desire to devote themselves unreservedly to the service of God. And in other houses, where prejudice or impiety had barred the door against his admission, a secret reverence was generally entertained for his character; and he himself is said never to have passed such families without a silent prayer that the gate of mercy might not be closed against them.

He regarded, indeed, the immoral and profane as of all objects the most miserable; and hence he adopted a variety of methods, some of which were not a little characteristic of the man, to warn them of the danger of their course, and to induce them to forsake it.

A poor collier, now living in Madeley, and upwards of eighty years of age, relates that in the former part of his life he was exceedingly profligate, and that Mr. Fletcher frequently sought opportunities to converse with him on his awful state. Being, however, aware of his pious vicar's intentions, he was accustomed, as soon as he saw him, to run home with all speed, and bolt the door before Mr. Fletcher could reach it: and thus, for many months together, he escaped his deserved reproofs. The holy man, however, still persevering in his attempts, on one occasion gained possession of the house of this determined sinner. The poor man, awed by the presence of his minister, and softened by the persuasive kindness of his manners, was greatly affected, and received those religious impressions which soon ended in a thorough change of his character. He is now nearly blind: and, with numerous bodily infirmities, is evidently tottering over the grave: but he is still, in his humble station, walking consistently in the fear of the Lord.

To another hardened individual, who had long refused to profit by his admonitions, and who in all probability was little able to enter into any other kind of reasoning, he said, in a solemn tone,—“ Well, John, you must either turn, or burn.” While many a refined observation, like a polished shaft, would have found, perhaps, an easy entrance into his mind, but which might as easily have been extracted; this homely but pointed phrase, like a barbed arrow, fastened itself within him; and he never found any rest in his spirit till he actually turned from sin to God.

Another of his parishioners, who is also still living, relates the following characteristic circumstance:—When a young man, he was married by Mr. Fletcher, who said to him as soon as the service was concluded, and he was about to make the accustomed entry,—“ Well, William, you have had your name entered into our register once before this.” “ Yes, Sir, at my baptism.” “ And now, your name will be entered a second time:—you have no doubt thought much about your present step, and made proper preparations for it in a great many different ways.” “ Yes, Sir.” “ Recollect, however, that a third entry of your name,—the register of your burial, will sooner or later take place. Think, then, about death; and make preparation for that also, lest it overtake you as a thief in the night.” This person also is now walking in the ways of the Lord; and states, that he often adverts to this and other things which this holy man found frequent occasion to say to him.—Many similar anecdotes are related by the older of his parishioners, all tending to show how watchful he was to seize every occasion which might be turned into usefulness; and with what readiness and versatility of powers he adapted himself to their various stations and feelings.

It was from the same benevolent motives that he was accustomed fearlessly to burst into the midst of their rude revels and riotous meetings. On these occasions his reproofs were so authoritative, and yet so mild and friendly, that they were generally received with silent submission, and not unfrequently attended with the most beneficial effects. Sometimes, however, he was compelled to acknowledge that his well-meant endeavours were unsuccessful; and that the impotent barrier which he opposed to their profligacy only made the torrent rise and swell, without stopping its current.

A profligate in a low situation of life, who had been often reproved by this faithful pastor, vowed he would never more enter into his church. This vow he strictly kept for years. One day having attended a corpse to the church-yard, he stopped in the porch during the service. After the funeral was over, Mr. Fletcher, who knew his vow and had remarked his conduct, took him aside and expostulated with him in the kindest manner, exhorting him to adopt a new course of life. But finding him quite hardened and brutal, he at length said to him in the most solemn manner, "I call heaven and earth to witness this day, that I am clear of your blood; henceforth it is upon your own head. If you will not come to God's house upon your own feet, prepare to come there on your neighbours' shoulders." Mr. Fletcher at the time had no design of prophesying evil: but spoke merely from a deep sense of the brevity and uncertainty of life. He was, however, immediately so struck with the force of his own language, that he could not refrain from trembling, under a strong presentiment of impending evil. The man fell ill in a fortnight: during his illness he was visited by Mr. Fletcher, without his being able to produce any satisfactory effect. "He seemed," said he, "tame as a wolf in a trap. May God have turned him into a sheep at his last hours." The poor man was buried within three months of his attending his neighbour's funeral, on the very spot on which they stood when Mr. Fletcher expostulated with him.

The publicans and colliers were his special enemies. To preach against drunkenness, and to cut their purse, were considered by the former as the same thing; and the latter were indignant at his opposition to their brutal amusements.* The rage of the publicans

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* "A club of men," said he, "blow by the hour clouds of smoke out of their mouth, or wash it down their throat with repeated draughts of intoxicating liquors. The strong fumes have already reached their heads: and while some stagger home, others triumphantly keep the field of excess; though one is already stamped with the heaviness of the ox, another worked up to the fierceness and roar of the lion, and a third brought down to the filthiness of the vomiting dog.

"In one place inhuman sport is afforded by an unhappy bird, fixed at some distance, that the sons of cruelty may exercise their merciless skill, in its lingering and painful destruction; or by two of them trained up and high fed for the battle, to whose feet steel talons, sharper than those of the eagle, are barbarously fastened. In another place, a multitude of spectators is entertained by two brawny men, who unmercifully knock one another down, as if they were oxen appointed for the slaughter, and continue the savage play, till one, with his flesh bruised, and his bones shattered, bleeding, and gasping as in the pangs of death, yields to his antagonist, and thus puts an end to the shocking sport.

"But it is perhaps a different spectacle, that recommends itself to the generally spent itself in impotent revilings: but the fury of the colliers was near being attended with more serious consequences. One day, while a mob of them in a state of intoxication were baiting a bull near a place where he was expected to preach, they determined to pull him off his horse; set the dogs upon him; and, in their own phrase, "bait the parson." But, just as he was going to set out, notice was brought to him that a funeral was on the road; and the previous information respecting it had, through mistake, been omitted. He waited, in consequence, some time for its arrival; and, after interring the corpse, proceeded to the spot, where he met his friends, and went through the duty without the least molestation; for before he came the bull had broken loose, and overturned the booth in which many of them were drinking; and the rabble, being intimidated by the disaster, had quietly dispersed.

But drunken colliers and self-interested publicans were not his only opposers. The voluptuary detested his temperance and self-denial; the proud poured contempt on his humility and condescension; the licentious were offended at his gravity and strictness; and the formal were roused to indignation by that spirit of zeal and devotion which influenced his whole conduct and conversation. And to these opponents must be

bloody taste of our baptized heathens. Fierce dogs are excited by fiercer men, with fury to fasten upon the nose, or tear out the eyes, of a poor confined animal, which pierces the sky with his painful and lamentable bellowings, whilst the surrounding savage mob rends the very heavens with the most horrid imprecations, and repeated shouts of applauding joy: sporting themselves with that very misery, which human nature, were it not deplorably corrupted, would teach them to alleviate."

added some of the neighbouring clergy and magistrates, who, with a greater show of reason, objected to his well-intended, but unauthorized, interference in their parishes.

In spite, however, of the opposition which his piety and peculiarities jointly excited, he gradually won upon the people by the invincible benevolence which was manifested in the whole tenor of his life. In the meantime, his church, which at first had been so thinly attended that he was discouraged at the smallness of the congregation, began to overflow; and, what must have been to him a source of far greater comfort, he saw an effectual change take place in many of his flock, and a restraint from the commission of open sin begin to prevail throughout the parish.

Madeley abounded with persons who, either from improvidence or misfortune, were reduced to a state of extreme indigence. Over this destitute part of his flock Mr. Fletcher watched with peculiar concern. The profusion of his benevolence is indeed scarcely credible. The whole rents of his small patrimonial estate were set apart for charitable uses; and he drew so liberally from his other funds as at times almost to deprive himself of the necessaries of life. "That he might feed the hungry," says Mr. Gilpin, "he led a life of abstinence and self-denial; that he might cover the naked, he clothed himself in the most homely attire; and, that he might cherish such as were perishing in a state of extreme distress, he submitted to hardships of a very trying nature."

His self-denial for the sake of the poor was indeed so systematic, and embraced such a variety of particulars, that mere general observations will convey a very inadequate idea to the mind. A few instances, therefore, as specimens, are subjoined. It is stated by some of his parishioners, who were occasionally witnesses of his private habits, that while he remained in a single life he did not choose to indulge himself with more than one fire in his house; and that during the winter he would sit for days together in his study with something wrapped round his legs to defend himself from the inclemency of the weather. Mrs. Fletcher also relates that he would sometimes say to her,—"Cannot we do without beer? Let us drink water and eat less meat. Let our necessities give way to the extremities of the poor." It is also mentioned that the tears have sometimes come into his eyes, on account of his having to pay the postage for letters upon immaterial subjects, at a time when he had only a few shillings in the house, which he was going to distribute among his poor neighbours.

On one occasion a pious man who was brought into very distressing circumstances, applied to him for relief, when, it should seem, his finances were so exhausted that he could not help him by any adequate pecuniary donation. At length, recollecting the pewter service which was placed on his kitchen shelves, like one who had found great spoil, he hastened to collect it together, and brought it to the poor man, saying, in his usual pointed manner, "This will be of service to *you*, and *I* can do without it. A wooden trencher will serve me quite as well." Such uncommon instances of liberality, it is readily allowed, are not only not enjoined by our religion, but in many supposable cases would be highly censurable. When, however, it is recollected that Mr. Fletcher spent the greater part of his life in a single state, and that after his marriage his wife cordially seconded him in these personal deprivations, it will be very difficult to find any just cause for censure.

No part of his conduct was more conspicuous than his attention to devotional exercises; and especially to that most important duty,—prayer, without which he neither formed any design, nor entered upon any concern; neither visited nor received a visitant. Mr. Gilpin, the present amiable vicar of Wrockwardine, (to whose interesting character of Mr. Fletcher the writer of the present narrative is very considerably indebted) gives the following account of his own introduction to him:—"Before," says he, "I was of sufficient age to take holy orders, I thankfully embraced the offered privilege of spending a few months beneath the roof of this exemplary man, to whom I was at that time an entire stranger; and I well remember how solemn an impression was made upon my heart by the manner in which he received me. He met me at his door with a look of inexpressible benignity; and, conducting me by the hand into his house, intimated a desire to lead me immediately into the presence of that God to whom the government of his little family was ultimately submitted. He instantly fell upon his knees, and poured out an earnest prayer that my present visit might be rendered both advantageous and comfortable, that the secret of the Lord might rest upon our common tabernacle, and that our society might be crowned by an intimate fellowship with that promised Immanuel in whom all the families of the earth are called to inherit a blessing."

But his attention to secret prayer was, if possible, still more memorable. "His closet," continues the same writer, "was the favourite retirement to which he constantly retreated, whenever his public duties allowed him a season of leisure. Here he was privily hidden, as in the presence of God; here he would either patiently wait for, or joyfully triumph, in the loving-kindness of the Lord; here he would plunge himself into the depths of humiliation; and from hence, at other seasons, as from another Pisgah, he would take a large survey of the vast inheritance which is reserved for the saints. Here he would ratify his solemn engagements to God; and here, like the good king Hezekiah, he would spread the various circumstances of his people at the feet of their common Lord. In all cases of difficulty he would retire to this consecrated place to ask counsel of the Most High; and here, in times of uncommon distress, he has continued during whole nights in prayer before God."

Very closely connected with this his habit and spirit of prayer, was the power which he so pre-eminently possessed, of living as in the presence of God by habitual recollection. It was this which shed such a peculiar lustre around the whole of his actions, that his intercourse with his fellow-men seemed almost like that of some angelic being who for a season was sojourning among them. Whether he prayed, or preached, or conversed, or transacted the most trivial concern of common life, there seemed to be no suspension of his intercourse with the skies. All was done as in the presence of his God and Saviour;—all with an evident reference to that important truth—"Thou God seest me."

"Recollection," says he, in a letter to a pious lady of his acquaintance, "is a dwelling within ourselves; a being abstracted from the creature, and turned towards God. To maintain this recollection beware of engaging too deeply, and beyond what is necessary, in outward things: beware of suffering your affections to be entangled by worldly vanities, your imagination to amuse itself with unprofitable objects, and of indulging yourself in the commission of what are called *small faults.*

"For want of continuing in a recollected frame all the day, our times of prayer are frequently dry and useless, imagination prevails, and the heart wanders; whereas we pass easily from recollection to delightful prayer. Without this spirit there can be no useful self-denial, nor can we know ourselves: but where it dwells, it makes the soul all eye, all ear; traces and discovers sin, repels its first assaults, or crushes it in its earliest risings. Recollection is a castle, an inviolable fortress, against the world and the devil; it renders all times and places alike, and is the habitation where Christ and his bride dwell.

"I give you these hints, not to set Christ aside, but that you may, according to the light and power given to you, take these stones and place them upon the chief corner-stone, and cement them with the blood of Jesus, until the superstructure in some measure answers to the excellence of the foundation."

Thus we find that his feelings, while realizing the

Divine presence, were not those of a fearful slave, subjected to the scrutinizing eye of a severe master; but of an affectionate and obedient child, delighting in the intercourse of a kind parent, animated by a sense of his presence, and looking to him for direction and a blessing on every thing which occurred. His spirit, like the magnetic needle, moved habitually towards its accustomed point; and if, through any sudden or powerful influence, it was momentarily turned either to the right or to the left, it never ceased to vibrate till it had regained its true position.

It is a matter of regret that so few persons ever aim at obtaining this spirit of recollection,—this important habit of realizing the presence of God. The attempt, if steadily persevered in, would, doubtless, be productive of similar effects with those discoverable in this very holy man. For, if we easily imbibe the spirit and adopt the manners of those with whom we constantly converse; if a painter, who is attentive to the original which he places before him, generally succeeds in obtaining a correct resemblance;—is it not rational to conclude that, if we were to live more as in the presence of God, we should insensibly be acquiring the same Spirit, and be daily more and more conformed to his image?

CHAPTER IV.

HIS SERMON AGAINST POPERY—TOUR ON THE CONTINENT—RECEPTION AT NYON.

The concern which Mr. Fletcher felt for the spiritual welfare of his flock, in connexion with his ardent desire to promote the cause of Christ, induced him to welcome other pious ministers to his parish, and also to make excursions himself not merely to places in his immediate neighbourhood, but occasionally to more distant parts of the kingdom.

About the year 1776 he says, "the coming of Mr Wesley's preachers into my parish gives me no uneasiness. We need not make two parties. I know but *one* heaven below, and that is Jesus's love: let us both go and abide in it; and when we have gathered as many as we can to go with us, too many will still stay behind." In the following spring he addressed the celebrated George Whitfield in these characteristic terms: "Your mentioning my poor ministrations among your congregation opens again a wound of shame that was but half healed. I feel the need of asking God, you, and your hearers pardon, for weakening the glorious matter of the gospel by my wretched broken manner; and spoiling the heavenly power of it, by the uncleanness of my heart and lips. I should be glad to assist you sometime this year: but I see no opening, nor the least prospect of any. What between the dead and the living, a parish ties one down more than a wife. If I could go any where this year, it would be to Yorkshire, to accompany Lady Huntingdon, according to a design that I had half formed last year: but I fear I shall be debarred even from this. I set out, God willing, to-morrow morning, for Trevecca to meet her Ladyship there, and to show her the way to Madeley.

"I rejoice that though you are sure of heaven, you have still a desire to 'inherit the earth,' by being a 'peace-maker.' Many ask me whether you will not come to have some fruit here also. What must I answer them? I and many more complain of a stagnation in the work. What must we do? Every thing buds and blossoms about us, yet our winter is not over. I thought Mr. Newton, who has been three weeks in Shropshire, would have brought the turtle-dove along with him: but I could not prevail upon him to come to this poor Capernaum. I think I hardly ever met his fellow for a judicious spirit. Still, what hath God done in him and me! I am out of hell, and mine eyes have seen also something of his salvation. Though I gladly yield to him and all my brethren, yet I must and will contend, that my being in the way to heaven makes me as rich a monument of mercy as he, or any of them. O that I may feel the wonderful effect of the patience that is manifested towards me. Lord, break me; and make me a vessel capable of bearing thy name, and the sweet savour of it, to my fellow sinners!"

Hitherto Mr. Fletcher could not be prevailed upon to revisit his native country. After ten years, however, of indefatigable exertion at Madeley, he yielded to the reiterated desires of his relatives. In a letter to his friend Mr. Ireland, dated March 26, 1769, he says, "I shall be obliged to go to Switzerland this year or the next, if I live, and the Lord permit. I have there a brother, a worthy man, who threatens to leave his wife and children to come and pay me a visit, if I do not go and see him myself. It is some time since our gracious God has convinced him of sin, and I have by me some of his letters which give me great pleasure: this circumstance has more weight with me than the settlement of my affairs."

It was in consequence agreed that at the commencement of the following year he should accompany Mr. Ireland, who was induced from private business to go to the south of France at that period. "Two reasons," observed he, in a letter to that gentleman, "to say nothing of the pleasure of your company, engage me to go with you to Montpelier,—a desire to visit some poor Huguenots in the south of France, and the need I have to recover a little French before I go to converse with my countrymen."

When he was on the eve of his departure, the Roman Catholics opened a chapel in Madeley, and drew over to their communion some individuals of his flock. Under these circumstances he considered it his duty to oppose them, and for that purpose to delay his journey for a few weeks. He accordingly preached a sermon in which he ably contrasted the doctrines of the apostles with the errors of the Papists. The apostles, he observed, represent the Holy Scriptures as a sufficient rule of faith and practice: but the Papists maintain that tradition is to be received with the same veneration, and that those are accursed who knowingly contemn it. The apostles declare that the one living and true God is the sole object of religious worship; whereas the Papists enjoin the worship of the host, and of angels, saints, images and relics. The apostles affirm that Christ is the only Mediator between God and man: but the Papists assert that there are many mediators to whom they are wont to have recourse, as the Virgin Mary, St. Peter, and departed saints in general. The apostles teach us that there is no merit, strictly speaking, in us, or in our works or sufferings; that at the best we are unprofitable servants; and that all merit is in Christ, His life and death, His atonement and intercession; that there is no propitiatory sacrifice but that of His cross, and no purgatory but His blood and Spirit; whereas the church of Rome, by her doctrine of indulgences, penances, and works of supererogation, as well as by that of the sacrifice of the mass and of purgatory, evidently depart from that faith, affirming that the works of justified persons do truly deserve eternal life, and pronouncing him accursed who denies that such works merit an increase of grace here, and eternal life hereafter. The apostles declare that the Holy Spirit is the only source of all inward or outward holiness: but the Papists maintain that the Virgin Mary is also a source of grace to the faithful, being accustomed to address her in these words, "Hail, Mary, full of grace;

the Lord be with thee, thy grace with me." As to the commandments, he said,—the Papists mangle the first; curtail, or openly break the second; and evidently contradict and violate the tenth, the Council of Trent having pronounced them accursed who say that concupiscence is sin. As to prayer, it is perverted by them, being ridiculously addressed to saints and angels, and that by means of beads and strings; as well as frequently offered for the dead; and, when in public, generally uttered in an unknown tongue. The two sacraments, he continued, are corrupted and abused by them;—that of the Lord's Supper by their doctrine of transubstantiation, by their considering it as a sacrifice for the dead, and also by their denying the cup to the laity. The other sacrament is rendered ridiculous, partly by their baptism of bells, and partly by their joining it with sundry foolish and unscriptural ceremonies. Marriage, he continued, is constituted a sacrament without any authority from Scripture; and yet is forbidden to their clergy.

The Romanists, who were previously sufficiently irritated, now openly professed their indignation. A man, who acted as their spokesman, cried out several times to the people, as they were leaving church, that there was not a word of truth in the whole sermon; and then, turning to Mr. Fletcher, assured him that he would shortly produce a gentleman who would refute it, as well as a pamphlet which Mr. Fletcher had distributed. These threats, however, they never thought proper to realize, whilst the bold and well-timed remonstrance of the zealous vicar prevented them from making any considerable progress in that neighbourhood.

As soon as this storm was blown over, Mr. Fletcher and his friend Ireland commenced their intended journey. They appear to have travelled immediately to the south of France; and, after they had remained in that neighbourhood a few weeks, to have proceeded to Italy, and taken Switzerland on their return to England. Mr. Fletcher's recent controversy with the Papists at Madeley induced him, during his journey, to pay particular attention to the state of that community. In order that he might thoroughly ascertain their religious opinions, he attended their sermons, visited their convents and monasteries, conversed with the best informed persons among them, and accurately observed their various ceremonies and superstitions.

On their arrival in the south of France, Mr. Fletcher for a short time left his fellow-traveller, that he might pay his intended visit to the Huguenots, the name by which the French Protestants had long been designated. The ancestors of these poor people had for ages been more or less the victims of intolerance and persecution. Their implacable enemy, Louis XIV. at first contented himself with debarring them of all marks of royal favour, restraining them in the performance of their public worship to certain privileged places, and offering them every inducement to embrace the Romish faith. At length, however, becoming less scrupulous in his plans for their conversion, he revoked the edict of Nantes, deprived them of all civil and religious privileges, and quartered his dragoons among them to compel them to profess the national creed. In consequence of these tyrannical proceedings, incredible multitudes fled to other countries for refuge, while such as remained in France were pursued like wild beasts, without remission, and without pity. The most rigorous measures at the same time were adopted to prevent further emigration; and immense numbers, who, goaded on to madness, had taken up arms in the fastnesses of the mountains of the Cevennes, were slain in the field, and their leaders racked on the wheel, and burnt alive.

From pious but somewhat romantic feelings, Mr. Fletcher determined to visit them on foot. "Shall I," said he to his friend, who remonstrated with him on his intended mode of travelling, "make a visit on horseback, and at ease, to those poor cottagers, whose fathers were hunted along yonder rocks, like partridges upon the mountains! No: in order to secure a more friendly reception among them, I will visit them under the plainest appearance, and with my staff in my hand."

Accordingly he set out alone on this christian expedition; and after travelling till it was nearly dark, he obtained, though not without some difficulty, permission to spend the night under the roof of a cottager. But the family were in a short time so charmed with the conversation and manners of their guest, that they considered the best provisions their house could afford too mean to set before him. After a hasty repast, the conversation was renewed, and at length closed by prayer. While Mr. Fletcher was engaged in pouring out his fervent supplications to God, the whole family were uncommonly affected, and in the morning took leave of him with mingled feelings of veneration and regret. Such was the account given by the cottager himself, who immediately circulated among his neighbours that he had nearly refused to admit a stranger into his house, who proved to be rather an angel than a man. It is an interesting circumstance that this family was of the Romish church.

Mr. Fletcher next proceeded to a small town, where he was hospitably entertained by a minister to whom he had a letter of introduction. Here he was received by the more serious Protestants with open arms, and exercised his ministry among them with much freedom and success. He conversed with their elders, admonished their youth, visited their sick, and diligently exhorted and instructed them from house to house.

In the course of his progress through these mountains, Mr. Fletcher spent some days with a person who rarely uttered a sentence without an oath. He accordingly addressed this unthinking creature in his usual pointed and pathetic manner, and not without effect. The man was deeply penetrated with the deserved rebuke; confessed his error; expressed a serious concern for the irregularity of his past conduct; and, in after life, whenever he was in danger of being carried away by an undue warmth of temper, the mere recollection of his saintly guest immediately tranquilized his mind.

Mr. Fletcher shortly after rejoined his friend Mr. Ireland, who procured for him a Protestant church in the neighbourhood of Marseilles. But, during the whole of the preceding week he felt such an unusual shrinking from the duties in which he was expected to be engaged, that nothing but a regard for propriety prevented him from declining to officiate. He had scarcely, however, entered the church when all his fears vanished. In prayer he manifested the greatest freedom of utterance; and was so peculiarly assisted in his sermon, as to astonish all who heard him. The whole congregation, among whom were several ministers, was exceedingly affected; and many of them were in tears during the greater part of the service.

From Marseilles they proceeded by sea to Antibes, where, meeting with a young Genoese who was on his return to Genoa, they accepted the offer of his company, as they were travelling in the same direction. After a short conversation, Mr. Fletcher was grieved by discovering that his new companion had imbibed skeptical notions; and at the same time he secretly determined to improve the present opportunity, by attempting to lead him from the grossness of materialism to the spirituality of the gospel.

Contrary winds, which detained them at Monacho, enabled him immediately to enter upon this truly christian design. At first the young man maintained his sentiments with considerable warmth, and with a strong persuasion that every attempt to refute them would be ineffectual. In the course, however, of a few hours he was unexpectedly staggered by the forcible arguments of his more enlightened opponent; and, after two days' debate, he candidly acknowledged himself vanquished, and expressed a desire that the controversy might be turned into a liberal inquiry respecting the nature of revealed religion in general.

This was a task for which Mr. Fletcher was admirably qualified. He explained the Scriptures in a manner peculiar to himself, equally intelligible and sublime, and gradually opened before his astonished companion a boundless prospect of grace and glory. The young man, who was no less affected with the parental concern than the masterly skill of his instructor, requested permission to attend their morning and evening prayers. On these occasions Mr. Fletcher expounded such portions of Scripture as were adapted to his circumstances; and on their arrival at Genoa, finding that the attention of his young disciple was unabated, he added various directions for the regulation of his future conduct. He exhorted him especially to search the Scriptures, and to continue instant in prayer. He set before him the trials and difficulties, which would probably attend his spiritual progress, together with the advantages and consolations which must necessarily accompany a religious life. And taking advantage of the superb and costly palaces which decorate that magnificent city, he guarded him against the devices of an ensnaring world, and pointed out the vanity of its richest gifts. At length, after having received many testimonies of the young men's sincere regard and gratitude, he took an affectionate leave of him under the delightful impression of his having been made the honoured instrument of a genuine and effectual conversion.

During the same journey, Mr. Fletcher was engaged in a similar controversy with a more formidable opponent. A gentleman of considerable information, but unhappily infected with infidel principles, stopped at the same hotel with our travellers; and, after having heard that he was in company with a zealous defender of Christianity, he carelessly threw down the gauntlet before him. Mr. Fletcher modestly accepted the challenge; and their conversation soon became serious. Every argument was proposed with the greatest caution, and every proposition examined with the nicest accuracy. Their debate was continued, at intervals, for the space of a week; during which period our pious traveller repeatedly overcame his antagonist, who regularly lost his temper and his cause together. In the course of this controversy Mr. Fletcher took a view of the christian's enviable life, his consolation in trouble, and his tranquillity in danger; together with his absolute superiority over all the evils of life and the horrors of death; interspersing his remarks with many affectionate admonitions and powerful persuasives to a rational dependence upon the truths of the gospel.

In consequence of this memorable debate, the unsuccessful disputant conceived so exalted an idea of his opponent's character, that he never afterwards mentioned his name without peculiar veneration and regard. And as a proof of the sincerity of his professions, when he met Mr. Fletcher some years after at Marseilles, he received him into his house, showed him every civility, and listened to his conversation on religious subjects with the greatest attention.

On their arrival at Rome, Mr. Fletcher's attention was deeply arrested by the superstitions of the Papists; and, had it not been for his more prudent companion, it is probable that his zeal would have overcome his judgment, and involved them in serious difficulties. As it was, Mr. Ireland considered that their lives were frequently in danger by his pointed observations. On one occasion, when they casually met the Pope surrounded by a kneeling populace, Mr. Fletcher could scarcely refrain from bearing a public testimony against Antichrist; and on another occasion, when they were going to attend the Pope's chapel, Mr. Ireland deemed it necessary to extort a promise from his friend not to express any public censure of what they should see or hear.

The sight of the Appian Way, which they traversed on their road to Naples, excited in Mr. Fletcher's mind the most lively recollections of the circumstances connected with it in sacred history. Before they entered upon it, he ordered the postillion to stop, assuring his friend that he could not bear to ride over that ground upon which the apostle Paul had formerly walked, chained to a soldier. He accordingly alighted from the carriage; and with his hat in his hand, and his eyes uplifted to heaven, he walked along the road, praising God in a most fervent manner for that light, those truths, and that influence of the Holy Spirit, which were continued to the present day. He rejoiced that England was favoured with the gospel in its purity; and devoutly implored that Rome might again have the truths of the gospel declared in those churches which were disgraced with a worship little superior to that of ancient Athens. He then took a view of the exemplary life, the extensive travels, and the astonishing labours, of the great Apostle. He recounted his sufferings when a prisoner, and his trials when at liberty; his rigid self-denial, and his voluntary poverty, for the furtherance of the gospel. He spoke of his painful ministry, and his violent persecutions, enlarging with peculiar energy upon his last journey from Jerusalem to Rome. He then referred to his faith, love, abundant revelations, and constant communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrating that, without such communion, he could never have supported the conflicts and sufferings to which he was daily exposed. Here he gratefully adverted to his own situation in being permitted to travel unmolested in a country, where genuine christianity was still a subject of abhorrence. "The ancestors of these people," he continued, "were stained with the blood of the innocent; and were the gospel to be proposed in its purity to the present generation, they would rush upon the preacher of it as so many beasts of prey, unless he who restrained the lions from devouring Daniel should control their destructive zeal."

They afterwards proceeded to Naples, where Mr. Fletcher's curiosity was excited by a towering monument several stories high, erected by the Jesuits in honour of the Virgin Mary, whose image stood on the top of the structure. An Italian inscription was engraven upon a stone of the monument to this purport:—"Pope Benedict XIV. grants a plenary indulgence to all who shall honour this holy image, with privilege to deliver one soul out of purgatory every time they shall pay their respects to this immaculate mother." While Mr. Fletcher copied the inscription in his pocket-book, two or three priests passed by:

they read in the countenance of the travellers a contempt for Romish superstitions; and looked displeased, but did not offer to insult them.

Mr. Fletcher afterwards visited the celebrated ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, which had been recently discovered near Mount Vesuvius. "I walked," said he, "in the streets of one of those unhappy cities which the King of Naples has brought to light, by removing part of the stratum of earth and ashes under which it lay buried; and I reached the theatre of the other, after having descended many fathoms through a well sunk in a rocky cinder, that was once the fiery fluid, with which the whole city was filled and covered."

On their arrival in Switzerland Mr. Ireland was not a little surprised at the grandeur of the house and furniture of General De Grange, Mr. Fletcher's eldest brother; for, from the silence of his fellow-traveller on the subject, he had no expectation of seeing any thing more of worldly respectability in this branch of his family than he had previously witnessed in the humble vicar of Madeley. We have no account of the intercourse between Mr. Fletcher and his relatives. It was doubtless affectionate in the highest degree; and the increasing attention which some of them had lately paid to religion must have given an additional interest to their meeting. Many years had now elapsed since he had left the place of his nativity: but no where was his preaching better received, or attended with more powerful effects, than at Nyon. His Swiss auditory were deeply impressed by the eloquence of one whose mind was enriched by cultivation, as well as animated by the purest devotion. The different clergy waited upon him, and severally pressed him to occupy their pulpits; and, wherever he was announced as the preacher, multitudes flocked from every quarter to hear him. At the same time the benefit derived from his public labours was pleasingly attested by the numerous applications he received in private for religious instruction. His fellow-traveller speaks with rapture of the success of his labours in this place. "Many despisers of revelation," says he, "were overawed and confounded; many formal professors were touched with the power of true religion; and many careless lovers of pleasure were impressed with a solemn sense of eternal things."

Amongst his hearers one young man was so deeply affected by his sermons, that he resolved to devote himself to the work of the ministry. Accordingly he applied himself from that time to studies of a sacred nature, and was afterwards appointed minister of the Protestant Church at Lyons. A good old clergyman too, who had heard him with delight, earnestly solicited him to lengthen his stay among them. And when he found that his request could not be granted, with tears in his eyes he affectingly exclaimed to Mr. Ireland, "O Sir, how unfortunate for this country; during my day it has produced but one angel, and it is our lot to be deprived of him."

At the time of his departure weeping multitudes crowded round his carriage, anxious to receive a last word or look; and not a few followed him above two miles from the town before they had resolution to tear themselves from his company.

Mr. Fletcher now proceeded directly to England, where he arrived in the middle of the summer of 1770, after an absence of five months.

CHAPTER V.

COLLEGE AT TREVECCA—POLEMICAL WRITINGS.

About a year previous to Mr. Fletcher's journey to the continent, the Countess of Huntingdon had established a seminary at Trevecca in South Wales. The terms of admission were "that the students should be truly converted to God, and resolved to dedicate themselves to his service." During three years they were to be boarded, clothed, and instructed at her ladyship's expense: and at the end of that period they were to take orders in the established church; or, if they preferred it, to enter the ministry among the Dissenters. At the earnest request of the Countess, Mr. Fletcher had undertaken the charge of superintending this society in occasional visits, when he was to give advice with regard to the appointment of masters, and the admission or exclusion of students; to overlook their studies and conduct; to assist their piety; and to judge of their qualifications for the work of the sanctuary.

For some time nothing could appear more prosperous than the state of the society. "The young men," says Mr. Benson, who was at that period tutor of the institution, "were serious, and made a considerable progress in learning; and many of them seemed to have talents for the ministry. Mr. Fletcher visited them frequently; and it is not possible for me to describe the veneration in which we all held him. Like Elijah, in the schools of the prophets, he was revered, he was loved, he was almost adored; and that not only by every student, but by every member of the family. And indeed he was worthy. The reader will pardon me if he thinks I exceed. My heart kindles while I write. Indeed I frequently thought, while attending to his heavenly discourse and divine spirit, that he was so different from, and superior to, the generality of mankind, as to look more like some prophet or apostle come again from the dead, than a mortal man dwelling in a house of clay."

But the college at Trevecca was already impregnated with the seeds of division, which needed only the hot-bed of controversy to luxuriate in all the fatal and disgusting fruits of animosity and schism. Lady Huntingdon, the founder, leaned to supralapsarianism; the Hon. Walter Shirley, the president, to sublapsarianism; Mr. Fletcher, the visitor, maintained the doctrine of general redemption; and Henderson, who had just resigned to Mr. Benson his office of classical tutor, was an Universalist. The superior talents, eminent piety, and conciliatory manners of the visitor might for some time longer have neutralized these jarring elements, had not Mr. Wesley, in his zeal to check the progress of Antinomianism, publicly bore his testimony, in his minutes of conference, against that error, in language which was supposed to border on Pelagianism.

His strong statements excited no little indignation amongst the high Calvinists of the day. The alarm spread to Trevecca; and, notwithstanding the liberality which had been previously professed, Lady Huntingdon declared that whoever did not fully disavow the doctrines contained in the minutes must quit the college. The students and masters were accordingly called upon to deliver their opinion in writing without reserve. Mr. Fletcher, in so doing, explained and vindicated the sentiments of the minutes, though at the same time he acknowledged that they were unguardedly expressed.

"Mr. Benson," he added, "made a very just defence, when he said he did hold with me the possibility of salvation for all men; that mercy is offered to all, and yet may be received or rejected. If *this* be what your ladyship calls 'Mr. Wesley's opinion, free will, and Arminianism,' and if 'every Arminian must quit the college,' I am actually discharged also; for in my present view of things, I must hold that sentiment, if I believe that the Bible is true, and that God is love. I am no party-man. In the Lord I am your servant, and that of your every student. But if a master is discarded for believing that Christ died for all; then prejudice reigns, charity is cruelly wounded, and party-spirit shouts, prevails, and triumphs."

Mr. Fletcher accordingly resigned his gratuitous appointment, wishing that her ladyship might find a minister to preside there less insufficient than himself, and whose sentiments were more accordant with her own.

At the time Mr. Fletcher retired from Trevecca he had no idea of taking any further part in the dispute. His only object was to induce the contending parties to lay aside all animosities, and peaceably to pursue their own course. In a conversation with Lady Huntingdon he advised her, as her college was now to be considered exclusively Calvinistic, to appoint a visitor of the same sentiments; and went so far as to recommend to her a person as well adapted for the office. In his letters to Mr. Benson, the discarded tutor, he urged him to suffer in silence, and to cast the mantle of forgiving love over every unpleasant circumstance. "So far as we can," said he, "let us keep this matter to ourselves. When you speak of it to others, rather endeavour to palliate than aggravate what has been wrong in your opposers. Remember that great lady has been an instrument of extensive good, and that there are inconsistencies attending the greatest and best of men. Possess your soul in patience; see the salvation of God; and believe, though against hope, that light will spring out of darkness."

For a time a conciliatory spirit was manifested, and something like an accommodation seemed to have taken place. But these appearances were fallacious, and the disputes soon broke out with greater violence than ever. In the meantime Mr. Wesley, who had neither leisure nor inclination further to pursue the controversy, after having briefly vindicated some of his expressions, and explained others, cheerfully delegated the employment to his pious and tried friend, the vicar of Madeley.

The natural disposition of Mr. Fletcher was averse from polemical divinity: but a deep sense of the evil of Antinomianism, which appeared to him to be gaining ground in Christendom, induced him, with much reluctance to engage in the painful task. On sending the manuscript of his first Check to Antinomianism to a friend much younger than himself, he says, "I beg, as upon my bended knees, you would revise and correct it, and take off *quod durius sonat*,* in point of *works*, *reproof*, and *style*. I have followed my light, which is but that of smoking flax: put yours to mine. I am charged hereabouts with scattering firebrands, arrows, and death. Quench some of my brands; blunt some of my arrows; and take off all my deaths, except that which I design for Antinomianism."

In such a frame of mind did this excellent man address himself to the work of controversy; and he conducted it in the same spirit. Neither polemical writing, nor the acrimony of some of his opponents, was able to discompose his heavenly temper. In his second Check to Antinomianism, he says, "I have long wished to see on both sides of the question, about which we unhappily divide, moderate men step out of the unthinking noisy crowd of their party, to look each other lovingly in the face, and to convince the world that with impartial zeal they will guard *both* the foundation and the superstructure against all adversaries, those of their own party not excepted. Whoever does this, *omne tulit punctum*, he is a real friend to both parties, and to the *whole* gospel; for he cordially embraces all the people of God, and joins in one blessed medium the seemingly incompatible extremes of scriptural truth. Ye men of clear heads, honest hearts, and humble loving spirits, nature and grace have formed you on purpose to do the church this important service. Therefore, without regarding the bigots of your own party, in the name of the loving Jesus, and by His Catholic Spirit, give professors public lessons of moderation and consistency, and permit me to learn those rare virtues with thousands at your feet!"

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* What may sound too harsh.

In the same conciliatory spirit he concludes this Check. "You condescend," says he, addressing himself to the Hon. W. Shirley, "to call me your 'learned friend.' *Learning* is an accomplishment I never pretended to; but your *friendship* is an honour I shall always highly esteem. The motto I thought myself obliged to follow was *E bello pax:** but that which I delight in is *In bello pax.*† May we make them harmonize, till we learn war and polemic divinity no more! If in the meantime we offend our weak brethren, let us do something in order to lessen the offence till it be removed. Let us show them we make war without so much as shyness. Should you ever come to the next county, as you did last summer, honour me with a line, and I shall gladly wait upon you, and show you, (if you permit me,) the way to my pulpit, where I shall think myself highly favoured to see you 'secure the foundation,' and hear you enforce the doctrine of *justification by faith*, which you fear we attack. And should I ever be within thirty miles of the city where you reside, I shall go to submit myself to you and beg leave to assist you in reading prayers for you, or giving the cup with you. Thus shall we convince the world that controversy may be conscientiously carried on without interruption of brotherly love; and I shall have the peculiar pleasure of testifying to you in person how sincerely I am, honourable and dear Sir, your submissive and obedient servant in the bond of a practical gospel."

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* We make war in order to get peace.

† We enjoy peace in the midst of war.

To what extent Mr. Fletcher's benevolent attempts were successful it is not possible to determine with accuracy. It may, however, be observed that Pelagianism appears to be nearly eradicated from the Church of England; and it is certain that Antinomianism has received a strong, it is to be hoped, an effectual check; and among the various causes which have produced this happy result his writings may in their measure be fairly included.

In the meantime his private letters breathed forth the same exalted piety as ever; while his constant desire was, that his people should be instructed in the simple doctrines and duties of christianity, undisturbed by the bickerings of party, unalloyed by the refinements of scholastic divinity. On one occasion, indeed, a person who had manifested great discomposure during public service, afterwards told him that he did not like his doctrine, because, before his sermon, he prayed as if all men might be saved. "And that," continued the man, "is false doctrine: if Christ himself came from heaven to preach it, I would not believe Him." But this was a rare case: the generality of his hearers had no more inclination to attend to controverted subjects, than their pious vicar to introduce them. And the more serious part of his parishioners; who had long admired his spirit and conduct, justly venerated him as one of the holiest and best of men.

"A fortnight ago," says he in a letter to a friend, "I paid a visit to West Bromwich: I ran away from the kindness of my parishioners, who oppressed me with tokens of their love. To me there is nothing so extremely trying as *excessive kindness*. I am of the king's mind, when the people showed their love to him on his journey to Portsmouth. 'I can bear,' he said, 'the hissings of a London mob: but these shouts are too much for me.' You, my dear friend, and all your family, have put me to that severe trial, to which all trials caused by the hard words that have been spoken of me are nothing. I return you all my warmest thanks; and pray that, *excess* excepted, you may all, in the day of your weakness, meet with as kind nurses and benefactors as you have proved to me."

In a letter to a pious friend, who was suffering under the effects of a severe illness, he says, "Let us rest more upon the *truth as it is in Jesus*, and it will make us more abundantly free, till we are free indeed; free to *suffer* as well as to *triumph* with him. Of late I have been brought to feed more upon Jesus as *the Truth*. I see more in him in that character than I ever did. I am persuaded that, if you study him, you will see new beauties in him in that point of view. Perpetual comforts are hardly consistent with a state of trial. I except those that are inseparable from a calm acquiescence in the truth, and the enjoyment of a good conscience. Our bodies cannot long bear raptures: but the silent beams of truth can always insinuate themselves into the believing soul, to stay it upon the couch of pain, and in the arms of death. I see Christ, *the truth* of my life, friends, relations, sense, food, raiment, light, fire, resting place. All out of him are but shadows. All *in him* are blessed sacraments, I mean visible signs of the fountain, or little vehicles to convey the streams of inward grace. As for pain, &c. it is only the struggle of fallen nature, in order to a full birth into the world of unmixed bliss. I am glad the Lord supports you under your troubles. Arise, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee. Enjoy *one* blessing as much as nature would repine under *ten* crosses. The Lord direct us by his light, and fill us with his love! The God of peace be with you, and raise you up to stand by his truth and people, and become more ripe for glory. Adieu; I am your's in him who is all in all."

CHAPTER VI.

PHENOMENON AT THE BIRCHES—HIS BAD STATE OF HEALTH—PACIFIC DISPOSITION.

In the summer of 1773, a place in the parish of Madeley, called The Birches, became remarkable for a violent concussion of the earth. The Severn was driven from its original bed, and formed for itself a new channel: the high road in some places completely disappeared; and in others was thrown into huge masses, resembling shattered lava. A large field was broken into misshapen mounds of earth, and innumerable chasms ; and a bank covered with fine oaks took possession of the deserted channel of the river.

Mr. Fletcher, having hastened to the spot, found a large concourse of people already assembled. With that promptness which was habitual to him, of attempting to derive improvement from passing incidents, he immediately spoke to the people collected around him ; and as he judged that many of his parishioners, who were never in the habit of attending his ministry in the church, might be induced, through curiosity, to join him on so extraordinary an occasion, he proposed speaking to them again on the following evening, at the same place, when he addressed them with considerable point, energy, and effect.

At the commencement of our unhappy contest with the Americans, Mr. Wesley published a political tract, in which he maintained the right of the English parliament to tax the colonies. This pamphlet, forty thousand copies of which were printed in three weeks, excited no little indignation among the English partisans of the Americans; and produced a spirited reply from Caleb Evans, a Baptist minister at Bristol. Urged by the pressure of more immediate concerns, Mr. Wesley once more delegated his cause to his friend, who, in the course of the controversy, displayed no less ability than zeal.

Whatever opinion may be entertained respecting Mr. Fletcher's general reasoning on the question, few Englishmen, it is presumed, will read without pleasure the following testimony of a foreigner to the excellency of the British Constitution.

"My reverence," said he, "for God's word, my duty to the king, and regard for my friend; my love to injured truth, and the consciousness of the sweet liberty I enjoy under the government, call for this little tribute of my pen. And I pay it so much the more cheerfully as few men in the kingdom have had a better opportunity of trying which is most eligible, a republican government, or the mild-tempered monarchy of England. I lived more than twenty years the subject of two of the mildest republics in Europe: I have been for above that number of years the subject of your sovereign; and from sweet experience I can set my seal to this clause of the king's speech at the opening of this session of parliament, 'To be a subject of Great Britain, with all its consequences, is to be the happiest subject of any civil government in the world.' "

"There is," he further observed in his second pamphlet, "a symmetrical excellence in the British Constitution which escapes the attention of many Britons. The capital business of the parliament is to keep the balance even between the king and the people; that neither oppressive despotism, (or the tyranny of one,) nor mobbing anarchy, (or the tyranny of many,) may prevail. The two houses of parliament are two *mediatorial* courts between the king and the people. The House of *Commons* is composed of senators chosen by the *people*, to be a check upon the king and nobles; and the House of *Lords* is composed of senators chosen by the *king*, to be a check upon the people and their representatives. Hence it appears that the House of Lords is peculiarly bound to maintain the prerogatives of the Crown against the encroachments of mobs and mobbing patriots; and that it is the peculiar duty of the House of Commons to maintain the privileges of the people against the encroachments of despots and despotic ministers."

That Mr. Fletcher was perfectly disinterested in engaging in this controversy no one could doubt who had any acquaintance with him. Had he felt any desire for worldly honour or emolument, it might have been abundantly gratified. For shortly after the publication of his tracts, one of them was given by the

Earl of Dartmouth to the Lord Chancellor, and by him presented to the king, who immediately commissioned a person to ask Mr. Fletcher whether any preferment in the church would be acceptable to him, or whether the Chancellor could assist him in any other way. But he answered with his characteristic simplicity, that he wanted nothing but an increase of grace.

Mr. Fletcher's incessant labours in public and private, in connexion with intense application to his studies, in which he frequently spent fourteen or sixteen hours in the day, had for some time been making perceptible inroads on his health. Two years before, he had observed to Mr. Ireland, "How life goes! I walked, now I gallop, into eternity. The bowl of life goes rapidly down the steep hill of time. Let us be wise. Let us trim our lamps, and continue to give ourselves to him that bought us, till we can do it without reserve."

In the middle of the following year, a little after Mr. Wesley had been dangerously ill in Ireland, he observes in a letter to a friend, "God has lately shaken Mr. Wesley over the grave: but notwithstanding, I believe, (from the strength of his constitution and the weakness of mine, which is much broken since I saw you,) he will survive me. So that I do not scheme about helping to make up the gap, when that great tree shall fall." The event proved as he conjectured. Mr. Wesley, though a much older man, survived him several years, and was enabled to persevere in his laborious and numerous avocations till within a few days of his death.*

In the latter end of this year, he says to Mr. Charles Wesley;—"Old age comes faster upon me than upon you. I am already so grey-headed, that I wrote to my brother to know if I am not fifty-six instead of forty-six. The wheel of time moves so rapidly, that I seem to be in a new element; and yet, praised be God, my strength is preserved far better than I could expect. I came home last night at eleven o'clock tolerably well, after reading prayers and preaching twice, and giving the sacrament in my own church, and preaching again, and meeting a few people at the next market town. The Lord is wonderfully gracious to me; and, what is more to me than many favours, he helps me to see his mercies in a clearer light. In years past I did not dare to be thankful for mercies, which now make me *shout for joy.* I had been taught to call them *common mercies;* and I made as little of them, as apostates do of the blood of Christ, when they call it a *common thing.* O, how I hate the delusion which has robbed me of so many comforts."

In the ensuing spring he thus addresses Mr. Benson:—"I send this to inquire after your welfare in every sense; and to let you know, that though I am pretty well in body, I break fast,—and that I want to break faster in spirit than I do. A young minister, in deacon's orders, has offered to be my curate; and if he can live in this wilderness, I shall have some liberty to leave it. I commit the matter entirely to the Lord. To lie at the beck of Providence, to do or not to do, to have or not to have, is, I think, in such cases, a becoming frame of mind. The few professors I see in these parts are so far from what I could wish them and myself to be, that I cannot but cry out, Lord, how long wilt thou give thine heritage to desolation or barrenness? How long shall the heathen say, Where is now their indwelling God? What are your heart, your pen, your tongue doing? Are they receiving, sealing, spreading the truth everywhere within your sphere? The Lord bless you; the Lord make you a child and a father. Beware of your grand enemy, earthly wisdom, and unbelieving reasonings. You will never overcome but by child-like, loving simplicity."

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* This remarkable man died on the second of March, 1791, in the 88th year of his age, and the 65th of his ministry. "No one," says Mr. Southey, "who saw him even casually, in his old age, can have forgotten his venerable appearance. His face was remarkably fine; his complexion fresh to the last week of his life; his eye quick, and keen, and active. When you met him in the street of a crowded city, he attracted notice, not only by his band and cassock, and his long hair, white and bright as silver, but by his pace and manner; both indicating that all his minutes were numbered, and that not one was to be lost."

Shortly afterwards he accepted of the invitation of his friend Mr. Welsey to accompany him, in moderate journeys, according to his strength, in one of his excursions to the north of England; and afterwards he spent some weeks at Mr. Ireland's to try the effect of the Bristol waters. It appears, however, from the following letter, that his health derived little improvement from either of these expedients. "With respect to my body," says he, "I know not what to say: but the physician says he hopes I shall do well; and so I hope and believe too, whether I recover or not. Health and sickness, life and death, are best *when* the Lord sends them; and all things work together for good to those that love God. I am forbid preaching: but, blessed be God, I am not forbid by my heavenly physician to pray, believe, and love. This is a sweet work, which heals, delights, and strengthens. Let us do it till we recover our spiritual strength; and then, whether we shall be seen on earth or not, will matter nothing.

A complete cessation from ministerial duties as well as change of air being at length strongly recommended to him, he took an affectionate leave of his parishioners at Madeley, in the autumn of 1776. On this occasion he preached from the appropriate words of St. Paul:—*What I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.* In the course of this sermon he adverted, in the most pathetic terms, to the painful situation in which he then presented himself to his hearers; so debilitated by disease, that he was unable any longer to discharge among them the public duties of his ministerial office. From his present weakness he looked back to his past labours, making many affecting reflections upon his own unworthiness, the indubitable testimonies he had received of the unfeigned affection of his people, and the happy effects of his ministry among them. Here he enlarged upon the two leading desires of his soul. On the one hand he made a solemn declaration of the earnest longing with which he desired to be *absent from the body* that he might be *present with the Lord;* and, on the other, he expressed a more than parental attachment to his flock, which excited in him a wish, that he might still be permitted to labour for their furtherance and establishment in the faith of the gospel.

Early in December, 1776, Mr. Fletcher (having been advised to travel for his health) paid a short visit to a pious friend at St. Neot's in Huntingdonshire. An additional inducement for his undertaking this journey, was the earnest desire he felt to converse with two eminent ministers of Christ, in that county; the Rev. John Berridge, vicar of Everton, and the Rev. Henry Venn, rector of Yelling. He accordingly requested the son of his affectionate host, the present Mr. Gorham (by whom this narration has been kindly communicated,) to accompany him to Everton.—Nearly twenty years had elapsed since Mr. Fletcher had been there; during which period he had published his "Checks to Antinomianism;" and Mr. Berridge had remarked upon them in his "Christian World Unmasked," with his honest zeal, and in his humorous manner.

"The instant we entered the room," says Mr. Gorham, "the good old vicar rose, and ran up to Mr. Fletcher, embracing him with folded arms; and then, with looks of delight and tears of affection, exclaimed, 'My dear brother, this is indeed a satisfaction I never expected. How could we write against each other, when we both aim at the same thing, the glory of God, and the good of souls! But my book lies very quietly on the shelf;—and there let it lie.' I retired, leaving the pious controversialists to themselves for about two hours. On my return, I found them in the true spirit of christian love, and mutually as unwilling to part, as they had been happy in meeting each other. ‘Brother,’ said Mr. Berridge, ‘We must not part without your praying with us.’ The servants being called in, Mr. Fletcher offered up a prayer, filled with petitions for their being led by the Holy Spirit to greater degrees of sanctification and usefulness as ministers; and dwelt much upon that effusion of the Spirit which fills the pages of his Tract called ‘The Reconciliation.’ Mr. Berridge then began, and was equally warm in prayer for blessings upon ‘his dear brother.’ They were indeed so *united* in love, that we were obliged, in a manner, to *tear* away Mr. Fletcher,* that he might keep his appointment with Mr. Venn, whom he was to meet at dinner at St. Neot's. Here we found that most lively and excellent minister waiting for us; and here we had another instance that good men of different sentiments need only be brought together, and unite at a throne of grace, to prove that they are of one heart. They met, they conversed, and parted with every demonstration of the most cordial and christian affection. Mr. Venn was so totally absorbed by his subject, while speaking of the duties of ministers, that Mr. Fletcher was obliged to remind him, playfully, that he had a meal before him.

“The next summer,” continues Mr. Gorham, “Mr. Venn was at Bristol; and, on his return, I heard him say from his pulpit at Yelling, (when discoursing on the influence of Divine grace,) that 'he had lodged six weeks in the same house with a truly pious minister, who was like an angel on earth!' He afterwards told me that he alluded to Mr. Fletcher.

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* “Some months after this, myself and Mr. Berridge called upon Mr. Fletcher, at Mr. Greenwood's at Stoke Newington; when they again met with the same affection.”

"Permission had been obtained for Mr. Fletcher to preach twice on the Sunday which he spent at St. Neot's: but it was partially withdrawn, through the interference of a party, headed by a clergyman in the neighbourhood. Mr. Fletcher was, however, allowed to address the smaller congregation in the morning. The most marked neglect was shown him by the above mentioned clergyman, who read prayers in the absence of the curate. These obstacles, so ungenerously thrown in the way of this heavenly-minded man, did not appear to move him to any other return but *love.* He took his text from 1 John iv. 19. 'We love him, because he first loved us.' His very look was love, whilst he explained and applied his subject with much fervour. The minds of a few had been prejudiced: but many hung upon the lips of the preacher. He had not been more than a quarter of an hour in his sermon, before an old lady left her seat, and abruptly quitted the church; two or three more followed her example, though in a gentler manner. As they were drawing towards the door, Mr. Fletcher noticed them; and said, in the tenderest manner, 'I am sorry to see that some of my hearers are weary of a subject which recommends itself to their attention in the affectionate declaration of my text, *he first loved us!* I will not be tedious: but O! that I might persuade you to love him!'

"His sermon was very impressive, but not long.

After service, several persons came to my father's house, desirous of an introduction to the preacher. As there yet remained some time before the afternoon service, it was proposed to Mr. Fletcher that he should give a short exhortation to the persons who had assembled. About thirty individuals were present. The writer of this little narrative well remembers the tears which flowed down the cheeks of many in the room, while this holy man spoke of THE LOVE OF THE REDEEMER. One young man who had been present, almost accidentally, declared, 'that his whole frame shook while Mr. Fletcher was speaking;'—and his testimony was the more remarkable, because the individual had been previously accustomed to ridicule religion. Many years after this, the clergyman above alluded to inquired after Mr. Fletcher; and on being informed by me that he was dead, he added, *I shall never forget that most excellent sermon.*

"During his stay at St. Neot's, he was engaged in writing a Tract called 'The Bible and the Sword.' Being desirous of urging its publication before the approaching fast-day in the American war, he requested that he might be called at a very early hour. I stole gently into his chamber, and kindled his fire, before four o'clock. The crackling of the wood awoke him. He withdrew the curtain, and said in his most tender manner, 'Is it you, my kind host, with your candle and fire? May the Lord light the candle of faith and the fire of love in our hearts.' There was such a sweet and humble manner in all he said, that I can never forget this salutation. Though now nearly fifty years have elapsed, I frequently step into the room, and look at the spot, where I received the dear saint's thanks, and heard his kind prayer.

"I had only one more opportunity of seeing Mr. Fletcher, which was at Leeds in August, 1781, where he preached at five in the morning, from the 2nd Epistle of Peter, 1st chap. 4th verse. Notwithstanding the earliness of the hour, at least two thousand persons were present, who appeared to listen to him with the deepest attention."

He now removed to the house of a Mr. Greenwood at Stoke Newington, where he experienced every benefit that good air, medical skill, and friendly attention, could afford. One end, however, of his retirement, which was to hide himself from company, was not answered. Persons of various ranks and sentiments flocked to see him; and his natural urbanity, vivacity of character, and eminent piety, too frequently led him to converse in such a manner as, whilst it edified his visitors, unhappily increased his own disorder. It was during this period that he first became acquainted with William Perronet, son of the Rev. Vincent Perronet, vicar of Shoreham, whom he had long numbered among the most endeared of his friends. The first sight of Mr. Fletcher, young Perronet frequently observed, had fixed an indelible impression on his mind, accompanied with a most affecting and lasting gratitude for the spiritual benefits he derived from his conversation.

Mr. Fletcher had a peculiar facility in making religious observations on the various occurrences of the day. This talent was especially manifested during his present illness. The taking his likeness, bleeding him, the menial occupations of servants, all suggested useful hints and spiritual illustrations. For any one to attempt to imitate him in this particular, would only be to render himself ridiculous: even the repetition of his observations, divested of the original manner and emphatic tone of voice in which they were delivered, would appear insipid. But his genuine simplicity gave a grace and dignity to whatever he said; and the seraphic piety which beamed from his countenance, even when he was silent, was not without effect. To a poor thoughtless wretch, who called upon him in a deep decline, he said in a solemn tone, whilst he laid one hand on his own chest, and the other on the man's, "God has fixed a loud knocker at your breast and mine. Because we did not regard, as we ought to have done, the gentle calls of his Holy Spirit, his word, and his providences, he has taken fast hold here; and we cannot get out of his hands. Oh! let the knocker awaken you, who are just dropping into eternity."

When any thing unkind, which had been said of him or of his writings, was occasionally mentioned, he would immediately stop the speaker, and frequently offer up an earnest aspiration for the person.

Indeed he never willingly permitted any thing to be spoken in his presence against his opponents; and at all times he made those allowances for them which, on a change of circumstances, he would have wished them to have made for him. The same tenderness of spirit led him carefully to avoid referring to the inconsistencies of others. "Never," said Mr. Venn, "did I hear Mr. Fletcher speak ill of any man. He would pray for those that walked disorderly: but he would not publish their faults."

In the meantime his health gradually declined. After having, therefore, in vain again tried the effects of the Bristol waters, he was induced, once more, to visit Switzerland, on what appeared a forlorn hope of deriving benefit from his native air. Even, under these circumstances, a hope of being useful to others appears to have had no little influence on his determining to undertake this journey. "I am going," said he in a letter to a friend who had kindly watched over his declining health, "to do by my poor sister, what you have done by me, to try to smooth the road of sickness to the chamber of death. Gratitude and blood call me to it:—you have done it without such calls: your christian kindness is freer than mine; but not so free as the love of Jesus, who took upon him our nature, that he might bear our infirmities, die our death, and make over to us his resurrection and his life, after all we had done to render life hateful, and death horrible to him. O! for this matchless love let rocks and hills, let hearts and tongues, break an ungrateful silence; and let your christian muse find new anthems, and your poetic heart new flights of eloquence and thankfulness."

Before his departure, however, two things were uppermost in his mind; the one to address a pastoral letter to his beloved parishioners, and the other to express his earnest desire to see the persons with whom he had been engaged in controversy, that, all doctrinal differences apart, he might testify his sincere regret for having given them the least displeasure; and receive from them some assurance of reconciliation and good will. All of them had not sufficient generosity to accept the invitation: those who came were edified as well as affected with the interview; and one, who had had no previous acquaintance with him, expressed the highest satisfaction, "at being introduced to the company of a man, whose air and countenance bespoke him fitted rather for the society of angels, than for the conversation of men."*

"I am more and more persuaded," said he in a letter to his parishioners, "that I have not declared unto you cunningly devised fables; and that the gospel I have had the honour of preaching, though feebly, among you, is the power of God to salvation to every one who believes it with the heart. God grant we may all be of that happy number!

"Want of time does not permit me to give you more directions: but if you follow those which fill the rest of this page, they may supply the want of a thousand. Have, every day, lower thoughts of yourselves, higher thoughts of Christ, kinder thoughts of your brethren, and more hopeful thoughts of all around you. Love to assemble in the great congregation, and with your companions in tribulation:

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*The person who used this expression was Dr. Price. Dr. Adams, late Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, having informed him of Mr. Fletcher's desire to have a parting word with his opponents before he quitted England, Dr. P. took an early opportunity of calling upon him at Newington. Not long afterwards, when Dr. Adams inquired of his friend what he thought of the Vicar of Madeley, he expressed himself as above.

This account was given to Mr. Gilpin by Dr. Adams himself, a few weeks after Mr. Fletcher's decease.

but, above all, love to pray to your Father in secret; to consider your Saviour who says, *Look unto me, and be saved;* and to listen for your Sanctifier and Comforter, who stands at the door, and knocks to enter into your inmost souls, and to set up his kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, within you. Let every one with whom you converse be the better for your conversation. Be burning and shining lights wherever you are. Be faithful to your God, your king, and your masters. Let not the good ways of God be blasphemed through any of you. Let your heavenly-mindedness and your brotherly kindness be known to all men, so that all who see you may wonder and say, *See how these people love one another!*

"I leave this blessed island for a while: but, I trust, I shall never leave the kingdom of God, the Mount Sion, the New Jerusalem, the shadow of Christ's cross, the clefts of the Rock smitten and pierced for us. There I entreat you to meet me. There I meet you in spirit. I hope to see you again in the flesh: but my sweetest and firmest hope is to meet you where there are no parting seas, no interposing mountains, no sickness, no death, no fear of loving too much, no shame for loving too little. In the mean time I earnestly recommend you to the pastoral care of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, and to the brotherly care of one another, as well as to the ministerial care of my substitute. The authority of love, which you allowed me to exert among you for edification, I return to you, and divide among you; humbly requesting that you would mutually use it, in warning the unruly, supporting the weak, and comforting all. Should I be spared to come back, let me have the joy of finding you all of one heart and one soul, continuing steadfast in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship one with another, and in communion with our God."

CHAPTER VII.

STATE OF RELIGION IN FRANCE—HIS RESIDENCE AT NYON—DEATHS OF VOLTAIRE, ROUSSEAU, AND HALLER.

In the beginning of December, 1777, Mr. Fletcher, accompanied by his old fellow-traveller, Mr. Ireland, commenced his journey for the continent. A strong gale, which prevented his immediately sailing from Dover, afforded him another opportunity of expressing his gratitude to his kind friends at Stoke Newington. "Ten thousand blessings," he says, "light upon the heads and hearts of my dear benefactors, Charles and Mary Greenwood. May their quiet retreat at Newington become a Bethel to them! May their offspring be born again there! And may the choicest consolations of the Spirit visit their minds, whenever they retire thither from the busy city! Their poor pensioner travels on, though slowly, towards the grave. His journey to the sea seems to him to have hastened, rather than retarded, his progress to his old mother earth. May every providential blast blow him nearer to the heavenly haven of his Saviour's breast, where he hopes, one day, to meet all his benefactors, and among them, those whom he now addresses. O my dear friends, what shall I render?—what to Jesus?—what to you? May he who invites the heavy laden take upon him all the burdens of kindness you have heaped on your Lazarus! And may angels when you die, find me in Abraham's bosom, and bring you into *mine*, that, by all the kindness, which may be shown in heaven, I may try to requite that you have shown to your obliged brother, J. F."

After a short passage they arrived at Calais; and from thence proceeded, by easy stages, to Dijon. Although the weather was severe, and, in consequence of their carriage breaking down, they were exposed for some time without any shelter to the piercing cold, he experienced no material inconvenience. From Dijon they proceeded to Lyons; and at length arrived at Aix les Bains, where they remained a few weeks. Mr. Fletcher's health now appeared to be somewhat improved. He walked out daily without suffering from his cough, or from the weakness of his chest. In a little time he was able to officiate at family worship; and, shortly afterwards, preached twice at Marseilles, and once at Montpelier, without any apparent injury to himself, and to the great delight of the congregations.

"I am not able," says his delighted fellow-traveller, "to express the power and liberty which the Lord gave him. Both the French and English were greatly affected: the word went to the hearts both of saints and sinners. You would be astonished at the entreaties of pastors as well as people. He has received a letter from the minister of the Levine mountains, who intends to come to Montpelier, sixty miles, to press him to go and preach to his flock."

In a letter to some friends in England Mr. Fletcher gives the following affecting description of the declension of religion, and of the prevalence of infidelity in France. "Gaming and dress, sinful pleasure and love of money, unbelief and false philosophy, lightness of spirit, fear of man, and love of the world, are the principal sins by which Satan binds his captives in these parts. Materialism is not rare; Deism and Socinianism are very common; and a set of free-thinkers, great admirers of Voltaire and Rousseau, Bayle and Mirabeau, seem bent upon destroying christianity and government. 'With one hand,' said a lawyer, who has written something against them, 'they shake the throne, and with the other they throw down the altars.' If we believe them, the world is the dupe of kings and priests; religion is fanaticism and superstition; subordination is slavery and tyranny; christian morality is absurd, unnatural, and impracticable; and christianity the most bloody religion that ever was. And here it is certain that, by the example of christians, so called, and by our continual disputes, they have a great advantage, and do the truth immense mischief. Popery will certainly fall in France in this or in the next century; and I make no doubt God will use these vain men to bring about a reformation here, as he used Henry VIII. to do that great work in England: so the madness of his enemies shall at last turn to his praise, and to the furtherance of his kingdom. If you ask what system these men adopt,—I answer, that some build on Deism, a morality founded on self-preservation, self-interest, and self-honour. Others laugh at all morality, except that, the neglect of which violently disturbs society; and external order is the decent covering of fatalism; while materialism is their system.

"O my dear Sir," he continued, "let me entreat you, in these dangerous days, to use your wide influence with unabated zeal against the scheme of these modern Celsuses, Porphyries, and Julians, by calling all professors to think and speak the same things, to love and embrace one another, and to stand firmly embodied to resist those daring men, many of whom are already in England, headed by the admirers of Mr. Hume and Mr. Hobbes.

"I need not tell you, that the hour in which Providence shall make my way plain to return to England, to unite with the happy number of those who feel the power of christian godliness, will be welcome to me. O favoured Britons! happy would it be for them if they knew their gospel privileges!"

In a letter to another friend, he thus characteristically enforced the importance of union among christians:—"If you saw with what boldness the false philosophers of the continent, who are the apostles of the age, attack christianity, and how they urge our disputes to make the gospel of Christ the jest of nations and the abhorrence of all flesh, you would break through your natural timidity, and invite all our brethren in the ministry to do what the herds do on the Swiss mountains when wolves attack them; instead of goring one another, they unite, form a close battalion, and face the common enemy on all sides. What a shame would it be, if cows and bulls showed more prudence and more regard for union than christians, and ministers of the gospel."

Early in the spring one of his brothers met him at Montpelier; and conducted him from thence to Nyon, the place of his nativity. Here he resided in the midst of affectionate relations, in the house which had been inhabited by his father; where every care was taken that he should want neither the best advice, nor any attention that could possibly contribute to the re-establishment of his health.

The paternal residence of Mr. Fletcher, still in the possession of his family, is a respectable old building erected on an elevated spot at the extremity of the town. The entrance to it, like that to many of the more ancient houses in Switzerland, is by a stone spiral staircase leading to an old fashioned hall, on the one side of which is a room, which, from its having been long inhabited by their saintly relative, still retains his venerated name. From one of the windows in this room a shady wood, the favourite scene of Mr. Fletcher's meditations, forms a conspicuous object in the midst of a widely-extended prospect varied with hill and dale, vineyards and pastures, and bounded by the gloomy mountains of the Jura. A few paces from the house is an extensive public terrace, from whence the whole expanse of the curving lake is clearly visible. At the farthest extremity on the right, after several intervening well-wooded bays, is seen Geneva, the cradle of the Reformation, and of liberty; and to the left Lausanne, and the celebrated castle of Chillon, appear in the distance, bounded by the Alpine peaks which embosom the hospitable asylum of St. Bernard, and the delightful valley of Chamouny. But it is necessary to visit this favoured spot to form any adequate idea of its beauty. It is one of those lovely scenes which painters in vain attempt to delineate, and poets, in their happiest moments, delight to celebrate. A brilliant sunset, and a trasparent mid-day are alike, though in different ways, subservient to the beauty of the prospect. During the former, the dells, the hills, the mountains, assume their finest purple livery, and Mont Blanc glows from his lofty station in raiment of burnished gold; and during the latter, the calm surface of the lake doubles by its pellucid mirror the milk white vestment of the gigantic monarch of the mountains, preceded by the gloomy forms of the Mole and the Salève, and graced on either side by a vast train of snowy satellites. With what sensations must the beaming eyes of the seraphic Fletcher, as he slowly paced along the spacious terrace, have gazed upon the enchanting scene, while religion impressed upon his mind the appropriating language, "My Father made them all." "Come," says he, in a letter to a friend, who had some idea of visiting Switzerland, "come and share a pleasant apartment in the house where I was born, and one of the finest prospects in the world. I design to try this fine air some months longer. This is a delightful country. We have a fine shady wood near the lake, where I can ride in the cool all the day, and enjoy the singing of a multitude of birds." "But this," he added, in that strain of piety with which he was accustomed to turn from temporal to spiritual subjects, "though sweet, does not come up to the singing of my dear friends in England. There I meet them in spirit several hours in the day."

The fine climate and delightful scenery, the pure air and relaxation from public duties, in connexion with the salubrious milk of the goat, and the luxuriant grapes of the country, which constituted the principal articles of his food, appear, through the divine blessing, to have ultimately re-established his health. His recovery, however, was very slow, and frequently interrupted by such relapses of his disorder, as brought him to the very brink of the grave, whilst they powerfully illustrated the influence of that religion for which he had so long been conspicuous. Once he was so much reduced by weakness and fever, as neither to know his own name, nor those of his surrounding friends. But even in this state there was a name engraven on his heart in indelible characters, which was continually on his lips. With uplifted hands, as though engaged in prayer and praise, he was often heard to repeat, "Jesus, blessed Jesus."

For some time after Mr. Fletcher's return to Nyon, his health was in too delicate a state to enable him to undertake much public duty.

"Afflicted," he said, "with a dangerous disease, and obliged to entrust the care of my church to a substitute, with the permission of my superiors I came to this place on a visit to my kinsmen: and more especially for the purpose of breathing my native air, which the physicians, after having already exhausted their art in my favour, considered as the last remedy that remained to be tried with any hope of success. Upon my arrival the pastors of Nyon, to the first of whom I have had the honour of being known for these thirty-six years, obligingly offered me the use of their pulpits, if my health should permit me to preach. But, after appointing different days on which I hoped to have taken the advantage of their friendly offers, by repeated returns of my weakness, I was prevented from fulfilling my engagements. I have, however, preached three or four times: but observing in myself, during these exercises, a want of strength to occupy the pulpit with that power and dignity which are expected in a preacher who appears before a polished audience, I considered it rather as my duty, with the permission, and under the inspection of our pastors, without ascending the pulpit, to give some familiar instructions to such children and others as were disposed to receive them; offering in a room, from time to time, occasional reflections, either upon some book of piety, or some passage of Holy Scripture."

The manner in which he first became acquainted with his juvenile flock is remarkable. One day, as he was riding in his favourite wood, he met several children who were gathering strawberries. "I spoke to them," said he, "about our Father, our *common Father:* we felt a touch of brotherly affection. They said they would sing to their Father, as well as the birds; and followed me, attempting to make such melody as is common in these parts. I outrode them: but some of them had the patience to follow me home, and expressed their desire to see me: but the people of the house stopped them, saying, I would not be troubled with children. They cried, and said,—*They were sure I would not say so, for I was their good brother.* The next day, when I heard it, I inquired after them, and invited them to come to me; which they have done every day since. I make little hymns for them, which we sing together from four to five. Some of them seem to be under sweet drawings of their heavenly Father; and a few of their mothers begin to come, and desire me, with tears in their eyes, to stay in this country. Yesterday I wept for joy on hearing one of them speak of conviction of sin, and of joy unspeakable in Christ, as an experienced Christian would have done."

The affection of the children for their kind instructor was, indeed, remarkable. Whenever they met him in his walks, their eyes sparkled with joy; and they showed that no employment was so delightful to them as that of joining with him in singing the hymns he had taught them, or listening to his instructive conversation.

As Mr. Fletcher's strength increased, it was naturally expected by admiring multitudes, that his public ministrations would become proportionably frequent. But at this period a spirit of hostility, which had for some time been secretly festering in the minds of some narrow-minded individuals, burst forth with unusual virulence. A highly respectable relative of Mr. Fletcher, who most courteously entertained the writer of this work, has since favoured him with the following account of this melancholy circumstance. "During the first short visit of my uncle to Switzerland, the generality of the neighbouring pastors, and especially those at Nyon, joined with their people in their enthusiastic admiration of him, and bore public testimony of their veneration for their pious brother labourer. But after his second journey, many of them, far from retaining their former sentiments, broke out into the greatest violence against him, doubtless from the jealousy with which they beheld the people eagerly flocking to the churches where he preached, while their own were deserted. Indeed, such was the anxiety to hear him, that not only the outer court, but those parts of the streets which were adjacent to the church, were completely filled. In the meantime the animosity of these pastors rose to such a height as to lead them to represent him to the government of Bern, to which this canton was then subject, as a person who preached doctrines dangerous to morality and the state; and at length they succeeded in having him excluded from the pulpit. Under these circumstances his ardent zeal led him to form private meetings for religious purposes, and afterwards to invite some of the more pious of his hearers to accompany him to the wood adjoining our town, where, notwithstanding the delicate state of his health, he almost daily instructed the multitudes who assembled. These meetings were continued till the period of his departure from Switzerland, an event which overwhelmed with the most lively grief all those who had been the witnesses of his ardent piety, and unbounded devotion to his divine Master.

"I was at that time too young to experience the effect produced by his overpowering eloquence, or to appreciate the eminent talents which he possessed, blended with so much humility. I remember little more beside the surprise I felt when for the first time approaching the church where he was preaching, I saw the building surrounded by a crowd collected from the town, and the neighbouring parishes, who were not able to obtain admission, and at the same time a number of ladders placed against the windows, completely covered with people, who appeared to be listening with the most devout attention. Nor was my astonishment diminished when, on another occasion, having been conducted by my father into the wood, I beheld him surrounded by what appeared to me an immense multitude of hearers, who, at the conclusion of the discourse, made the echoes resound with the singing of their sacred hymns. You, my dear sir, have yourself visited the places where these interesting scenes were realized, and I am convinced that it was not without some emotions."

It was, indeed, impossible to enter the ancient venerable church of Nyon, whose plain open pews, large projecting gallery, and simple stone pulpit, present a fine specimen of Swiss simplicity, without being deeply impressed with the consideration that this was the very place where Fletcher had so powerfully preached the glorious gospel of our divine Saviour; or to traverse the wood consecrated by his private meditations, without experiencing a mixture of feelings more easily conceived than described. Here was the retired walk where he poured out his soul in private prayer; a little farther was the place where he taught the children to warble the praises of their Saviour; and here, again, the very spot where, with a heart glowing with love to God and man, he called upon all around him to embrace the precious promises of the gospel, and to partake of those joys which he himself experienced. There was a sort of fascination in the place. The stillness of the spot, the verdure of the surrounding trees, the singing of the feathered tribe, and an immense stone-table, placed as if purposely for a pulpit, at the junction of the various roads, might, under similar circumstances, have induced a more phlegmatic man than Fletcher to elevate the attention of all around him, from the works of nature to those of nature's God.

It is to the honour of the pastors of Nyon, that they were not infected with the rancorous spirit of their brethren; but that, as far as circumstances would allow, they manifested an unabated attachment, and profound respect, for their persecuted countryman.—"Our ministers," says he, "are very kind, and preach to the purpose. A young clergyman, a true Timothy, has opened me his house, where I exhort twice a week; and the other clergymen, encouraged by his boldness, come to our meetings."

The ardent affection of the pious part of his auditory may be collected from the following circumstance. "I have complied," says he in a letter to one of his parishioners, "with the request of my friends, to stay a little longer, as it was backed by a small society of pious people gathered here. Three weeks ago they got about me; and on their knees, with many tears, besought me to stay till they were a little stronger, and able to stand alone; nor would they rise, till they had got me to comply. Happy would it be for us all, if we prayed as earnestly to Him, who can give us *substantial* blessings."

In the latter part of 1778, Mr. Wm. Perronet visited Nyon, for the purpose of consulting Mr. Fletcher respecting his claims to an estate at Chateau d'Oex, which had by some means lapsed from his family. On this occasion Mr. Fletcher, having kindly translated for him his various documents, and procured the best legal advice, accompanied his young friend along the fine Alpine scenery which led to the litigated spot. "Neither Mr. Fletcher nor the lawyer whom we took with us," says young Perronet in a letter to his father, "had ever visited this northern region of their own country, so that the journey was as new to them as to myself. It was no easy matter, at this season, to procure a guide: however, at last we agreed with one; and set out on a journey of near eighty miles across the Alps, passing over mountains of snow, and rocks of ice, till we came within nine miles of the place, when we were obliged to get into an open sledge, on account of the difficulty and danger attending the road. And now we travelled through narrow passes cut through the snow, (which was many feet above our heads,) on the sides of mountains, whose summits the eye could scarce reach; and frequently on the very brink of precipices, at the bottom of which we could hear the waters roar like thunder, and could see it in some places rushing down the sides in torrents, and forming in its passage vast pillars of ice amongst the rocks. Here we were shown the place where a coach had lately fallen down; and a little farther the spot where a native of Chateau d'Oex, but a few days before, was murdered, and then thrown down the precipice. We arrived, at length, at the town, where all the houses are built entirely of wood, with enormous kitchen chimnies, the whole size of the room, running up to a vast height in the form of a steeple. On the fronts of the houses are carved, in large letters, the names of the persons who built them; and some moral or religious sentence, with a prayer that the inhabitants may be preserved from pestilence, &c.

"The town is situated on a small spot, amidst huge rocks and mountains, piled one on the other, the heads of many of which are often hid amongst the clouds. The slopes are beautifully adorned with lofty pines, whilst the enormous sides of others are naked, craggy, and almost perpendicular. For here all the works of nature, or rather of the God of nature, are terribly magnificent; so that, in viewing them, one cannot but admire and tremble at the same instant.

"The weather here is extremely severe: it is scarce in the power of clothes, or even fire, to keep us warm; and the wolves begin to leave the forests, and to prowl about the villages. Two of them, Mr. Fletcher tells me, were seen near this town the other day; one of which was killed by the country people.

"Whether I succeed in my temporal business or not, I shall ever remember, with pleasure and thankfulness, the opportunities I have been blessed with of spending so much time in company with our inestimable friend: who, wherever he goes, preaches the gospel, both by his words and example, nay, by his very looks, not only to his friends, but to all he meets with. So that on the top of the frozen Alps, and in the dreary vale of Chateau d'Oex, some good seed has been sown. And here also he was visited by some of the principal inhabitants of the town; who stood round him in deep attention for almost an hour, while he both exhorted and prayed."

"I have had the pleasure," says Mr. Fletcher in a letter to the same venerable clergyman, "of accompanying your son to your father's birth-place. It is a charming country for those who have a taste for highland prospects:—but what is it to our heavenly Father's hill of Sion? Thither may we all travel, and there may we all have a happy meeting, and find an eternal inheritance. Whether you will obtain your earthly estate, in these parts, in *possession*, as it is yours by *right*, is yet to me matter of doubt. A little time, I hope, will decide the question: and as Providence will throw in the turning weight, it will be for the best, which way soever the affair ends." A few weeks afterwards he writes to the same venerable clergyman, "Our Redeemer liveth; and when sickness and death shall have brought down our flesh to the earth, we shall, by his resurrection's power, rise and live for ever with him in heavenly places. For the new earth will be a heaven, or a glorious province of the kingdom of heaven. With it we shall be restored to paradisaical beauty, and filled with righteousness. Well, the meek shall inherit it; and that inheritance shall be fairer than yours at Chateau d'Oex, and surer too. I hope to accompany your son soon to England. Let us all move towards our heavenly country, by Christ, who is the only way; a way strait, sure, luminous, and where the wayfaring man, though a fool, will have more wisdom than all the teachers of the mere letter."

During his long residence at Nyon, Mr. Fletcher composed his Portrait of St. Paul, finished a poem on the praises of God which he had begun some years before, and composed several minor pieces in his own language. Shortly after his death, his Portrait of St. Paul was translated into English by Mr. Gilpin, who subjoined some biographical notes illustrative of the character of his author, by a splendid parallelism of it with that of the apostle. His poem also, a second and enlarged edition of which was published by Mr. Fletcher, under the title of "La Grace et La Nature," as being more definite, and including the idea of a descant on the creation, has more recently appeared in an English dress. The notes which accompany it will, perhaps, by many of its readers, be considered the most valuable parts of the work. They are written with considerable spirit; and abound with cogent arguments in support of our holy faith, against the specious objections of infidelity. A translation rarely, if ever, transfuses the spirit of the original: the English reader must not, therefore, expect to form an accurate idea of the style of the author from the annexed version of his observations on the redemption of man by Jesus Christ.

"If a loadstone," says Mr. Fletcher, "can communicate its virtue without losing it, and if this virtue can be completely incorporated in a piece of iron,—why cannot the Eternal Word, who essentially dwells in the Father, be communicated to an individual of the human race, and especially in the soul of a man-Saviour, by whom other men may be made partakers of the holiness and of the happiness of God, without themselves becoming gods; as by means of an iron powerfully magnetized, needles may partake of the attraction and polarity of the load-stone, without being load-stones by nature?

"God is an infinite Being, and all his perfections are infinite like himself: his holiness, his justice, his goodness, and his wisdom, are so many depths which the human understanding cannot fathom. Can we then, without temerity, affirm, that in these depths of justice, holiness, and love of order, there cannot be a severity so great as not to pardon sin completely, until a just indignation has been manifested against it?

"If the Majesty of God be infinite,—is it reasonable to say, that crimes committed against it by a countless multitude of beings;—crimes committed with the greatest insolence, and the proudest obstinacy;—crimes accumulated by creatures loaded with favours;—crimes repeated with a thousand aggravations, during thousands of years, in every part of the world; is it reasonable, I say, to affirm, that such crimes ought to be pardoned by a Legislator of infinite justice, without punishing this criminal race in the most exemplary manner?

"If such a chastisement would have crushed all the guilty; and if the *goodness* of God be as immense as his *justice*,—is it reasonable to suppose, that infinite *goodness* could not offer to infinite *justice* a victim of unlimited worth, fully to expiate on conditions worthy of God, crimes which were become infinite by their number, their duration, the holiness of the laws violated, the greatness of the Benefactor offended, the majesty of the Legislator insulted, and the insolence of the violators of his laws?

"Has not *infinite wisdom* power to reconcile the rights of infinite *justice* and infinite *goodness?* What absurdity is there then in forming a plan of redemption, by which a Being of an innocence, a love, an obedience and a power incomprehensible, could generously unite himself to human nature, and pay the immense debt of this nature, soften the hearts of these rebels, and give to all creatures endowed with reason the most perfect demonstration of a wisdom, a goodness, a holiness, and a justice infinite, which should concur in maintaining their rights, and in completely developing themselves through time and eternity?

"Is it not strange that such a plan, formed by the love, the justice, the wisdom, and the goodness of the Supreme Being, and executed by the Word incarnate, in conformity with so many prophecies;—a plan which has excited the admiration of angels, and of millions of pious persons during so many ages; which has comforted penitents under the most terrible circumstances, and made the afflicted to triumph in the bosom of sorrow, and the sick to rejoice in the arms of death;—is it not strange, I say, that such a plan should be the constant object of the contempt of Socinians and Deists? Shall the finite judge the Infinite? Shall the pretended advocates of reason be always so unreasonable as absolutely to fix what the justice of the Supreme Being has a right to exact, what the moral order of the Universe ought to require, and what infinite goodness should bestow upon his creatures?

"How absurd is that religion, which has for its principle this dogma of the sages of our age:—A being circumscribed as myself, who never knew his grandson, or his grandfather, who is ignorant of the nature of his soul, nay, of the vilest atoms which compose his body; nevertheless so perfectly understands the depths of the justice, and mercy, and wisdom of God, as to decide that the redemption of mankind by the propitiatory sacrifice of the Son of God, is contrary to these perfections!

"Are not the contracted views which modern philosophers entertain of the goodness of God, the excellence of an immortal soul, and the odious nature of sin, one of the causes of their incredulity? It is impossible, say they, that the *Eternal Word*, the *Prince of life*, should become incarnate in order to offer himself as a sacrifice for the human race. But, if the soul of man be made in the image of God; if it be infinite in its duration and its desires; if its perfectability be boundless; if God love it as a father cherishes a child; if the love which is in God as much surpass the generosity of all men, the love of all fathers, and the tenderness of all mothers, as infinity surpasses what is finite—is it reasonable to say, that our heavenly Father could never make for thousands of souls so great a sacrifice as that of his Word incarnate?

"If king Codrus so loved his subjects as to disguise himself, and present himself to death, that he might obtain for them some temporal advantages; if Decius and Curtius felt so lively an interest in the safety of their country, as to sacrifice their own lives in order to deliver their *fellow-citizens* from a transient calamity; if a Swiss, by his noble self-devotion at Sempach ran to meet death, that he might open a road to victory for his countrymen, by collecting into his own body the bristled javelins of the enemy's battalions; if mothers have lost their own lives to preserve those of their children; and if friendship, or a glorious desire of saving one's neighbour, still produces such sacrifices;—is it not absurd to say, that infinite goodness wants either power or the inclination to perform an act of compassion sufficiently noble and effectual, to rescue millions of souls from the most dreadful miseries, and to procure for them blessings of an infinite duration, and an inestimable value?

"O you, who love wisdom, and deserve the name of philosopher, if you contemplate the Majesty of the Supreme Being, the immensity of his perfections, the holiness of his laws, the beauty of moral order, the desert of sin, and the value of the souls whom Jesus Christ has redeemed, you will see that there is less absurdity in believing, than in doubting, that God has power and inclination to make a sacrifice of *infinite value* for their redemption.

"If you say that this redemption of mankind by the humiliation and sufferings of the incarnate Word, is unworthy of God,—we ask you, Is it unworthy of a Being infinitely good, to give an astonishing proof of his goodness? Is it unworthy of a Being infinitely just, to manifest his justice in a manner the most exemplary? Is it unworthy of an infinite wisdom, to form a Divine Man, sufficiently rich to become surety for his brethren, sufficiently strong to bear the burdens which would have borne them down eternally, sufficiently good and wise to obtain for them the pardon of their sins, in becoming for them the model of perfect holiness, and the channel of grace by which they may recover the holiness and glory from which they are fallen?

"But it is not credible (you say) that the Prince of life should die. Let us understand each other. The Prince of life did not, properly speaking, die; that was absolutely impossible: but the Prince of life, having united himself to a human and mortal body, was willing to quit it two or three days, after having endured unheard of sufferings. Thus, the mortal body entered into the state of death, the sacrifice offered to Divine justice was complete, the grave was consecrated for the consolation of mortals, the faithful had a firm pledge of their resurrection in that of their Chief, and the Saviour fully showed himself the *resurrection* and the *life* in coming forth victorious from the tomb, into which he had entered " to destroy him that had the power of death, and to deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Heb. ii. 14.

"Lastly, if the Word humbled himself on this earth by his union with a mortal body during thirty-three years, and by his condescension in suffering this body to repose three days in the grave;—what is this space of time for the *Prince of eternity?* A thousand years are as one day; three days as the twinkling of an eye; and so far from being dishonoured by this momentary act of pity, of love, and of mercy, he has acquired, in the estimation of all reasonable beings, a glory so great, that sooner or later every knee shall bend before him both in heaven and on earth. We may then conclude with St. Paul; that the doctrine of the cross is to them that perish foolishness: but unto them which are saved it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God." 1 Cor. i. 18, 24.

In addition to these customary employments, Mr. Fletcher watched over his relations with peculiar anxiety and affection. At one time he admonished them with the authority of a minister; at another entreated them with the gentleness of a brother; and not unfrequently mingled affectionate tears with his admonitions and entreaties. A few passages from a letter, which some time before he wrote to one of his brothers, will set this amiable part of his disposition in a just point of view, and afford no inadequate idea of the impressive and characteristic manner in which he addressed them. "Do not reject," said he, "I conjure you, my brotherly counsels and supplications. Do not refuse to come where so much felicity awaits you, because pressed to it by a person who is unworthy to bring you the invitation. We have passed our infancy and our youth beneath the same roof, and under the same masters. We have borne the same fatigues, and tasted the same pleasures. Why then should we be separated now? Why should *they* be divided, who by nature, habit, and friendship, have been so long united? I have undertaken a journey to the New Jerusalem: O suffer me not to go thither alone. Come, my dear brother; I am most unwilling to leave you behind. Come, support me; go before me; encourage me; show me the way. I feel the want of a faithful companion, and a christian friend. I desire neither your gold nor your silver: but I am anxious that you should share my joy. Do not tell me again, that piety is usually the portion of younger brothers, since I read in the Old Testament that every first-born male should be consecrated, in a peculiar manner, to God. Let me rather entreat you to take the advantage of your situation. Be at least as far beyond me in piety, as you are in years; and, instead of feeling any jealousy upon this account, my pleasure will be augmented in the great day of our Lord Jesus Christ to see myself placed at your feet."

A long continued and dangerous illness of his sister, in connexion with the recent deaths of some near relations, would naturally stimulate him to fresh earnestness in discharging the unpleasant duty of reproof, and at the same time render the survivors more willing to receive his friendly admonitions. "I have some hopes," said he, "that my poor sister will yet be my sister in Christ. Her self-righteousness, I trust, breaks as fast as her body. I am come hither to see death make havoc among my friends. I wear mourning for my father's brother, and for my brother's son. The same mourning will serve me for my dying sister, if I do not go before her. She lies on the same bed where my father and mother died, and where she and I were born. How near is life to death! But, blessed be God, Christ the Resurrection is nearer to the weak dying believer! Death works through the body, and the resurrection through the soul: and our soul is our real self."

While Mr. Fletcher was thus labouring to be useful to his own countrymen and relatives, he was not unmindful of his flock at Madeley. "I am yet," said he, in a letter which he wrote to them, "in the land of the living, to prepare, with you, for the land where there is life without death, praise without weariness of the flesh, and love without separation. There I once more challenge you to meet me. May there not be found one Demas among you, turning aside from the little flock and the narrow way, to love and follow this present perishing world. May there not be one Esau, who, for a frivolous gratification, sold his birthright; nor another wife of Lot, who looked back for the good things of the City of Destruction, and was punished by a judgment almost as fearful as that of Ananias, Sapphira, and Judas. My dear companions, let us be consistent: let us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all other things, upon your *diligent, frugal, secondary endeavours*, shall be added unto you. Let us live daily, more and more, upon the free love of our gracious Creator and Preserver, the grace and righteousness of our atoning Redeemer and Mediator, nor let us stop short of the powerful joyous influence of our Comforter and Sanctifier."

During his continuance at Nyon, Mr. Fletcher made an excursion with his brother to some of the villages situated in one of the beautiful valleys in the midst of the Jura mountains. Their little tour afforded them a fine opportunity of contrasting the different effects of a languid ministry in a reformed church with those of a zealous one in a corrupt communion. It is indeed to be deplored that while the Reformation has in many places happily rooted out a disgraceful superstition, and established a scriptural creed, it has not been equally successful in transferring that religious feeling which is the life blood of many Roman Catholic congregations. A protestant village, which was the first visited, presented the pleasing spectacle of an industrious, thriving population, actively engaged in the various employments of coopers, watchmakers, and jewellers. A little conversation, however, soon convinced them that the inhabitants were alike destitute and heedless of the power of vital religion. They said they had the best singing, and the best preacher, in the country: but, when questioned respecting any radical change produced by his ministry, they coldly replied, "We do not live in the time of miracles."

The visit of the brothers to a Popish village was more satisfactory. On their arrival their attention was excited by a prodigious concourse of people, who, they at first supposed, were assembled in consequence of a fair. They were, however, soon informed that they were collected to hear three Catholic missionaries who travelled through different parts of the country to assist the regular clergy. The scene was no less interesting than novel. One of the missionaries ascended the pulpit; and the parish priest proposed various questions to him, which he answered at full length, and in a very edifying manner. The subject was, the unlawfulness and mischief of those methods by which persons of different sexes lay snares for each other, and corrupt each other's morals. This delicate topic was treated with the greatest propriety, and in a manner well adapted to arrest the attention of a mixed assembly. The conference being ended, another missionary occupied the pulpit, and selected for his text our Lord's description of the day of judgment. Every eye appeared to be riveted upon him; and when at length he described the departure of the wicked into eternal fire, the greater part of the congregation burst into tears. "The wicked," said the missionary, "may then urge that God is merciful, and that Jesus Christ has shed His blood for them. 'But that mercy,' the Judge will reply, 'you have slighted; and now is the time of justice: that blood you have trodden under foot, and now it cries for vengeance.' Know then your day," continued the preacher, addressing himself to his hearers; "slight the Father's mercy and the Son's blood no longer."

One of the years which Mr. Fletcher spent in Switzerland was memorable for the deaths of three celebrated men in those parts,—Voltaire, Rousseau, and Haller. The closing scene of their lives was characteristic of the individuals, and was thus described by him: "Tronchin, the physician of the Duke of Orleans; being sent for to attend Voltaire in his illness at Paris, Voltaire said to him, 'Sir, I desire you would save my life. I will give you the half of my fortune if you lengthen out my days only for six months. If not, I shall go into hell-fire, and you will follow me.'"

"Rousseau died more decently, as full of himself as Voltaire was of the wicked one. He paid that attention to nature and the natural sun, which the christian pays to grace and the Sun of Righteousness. These were some of his last words to his wife:—'Open the window that I may see the green fields once more. How beautiful is nature! How wonderful is the sun! See what glorious light it sends forth! It is God who calls me. How pleasing is death to a man who is not conscious of any sin! O God, my soul is now as pure as when it first came out of Thy hands: crown it with Thy heavenly bliss.' God deliver us from self and Satan—the internal and external fiend. The Lord forbid we should fall into the snare of the Sadducees, with the former of these two famous men; or into that of the Pharisees, with the latter.

"Baron Haller was a great philosopher, a profound politician, and an agreeable poet; particularly famous for his skill in botany, anatomy, and physic. He has enriched the republic of letters by such a number of publications in Latin and German, that the catalogue of them is alone a pamphlet. This truly great man has given another proof of the truth of Lord Bacon's assertion, that, 'although smatterers in philosophy are often impious, true philosophers are always religious.' I have met with an old apostolic clergyman, who was intimate with the Baron, and used to accompany him over the Alps in his rambles after the wonders of nature. 'With what pleasure,' said the minister, 'did we admire and adore the wisdom of the God of nature, and sanctify our researches by the praises of the God of grace.' When the emperor passed this way he cut Voltaire to the heart by not paying him a visit: but he waited on Haller, was two hours with him, and heard from him the most pious and edifying conversation. The Baron was then ill of the disorder which afterwards carried him off. Upon his death-bed he suffered severe conflicts about his interest in Christ: and sent to the old minister, requesting his most fervent prayers, and wishing him to find the way through the dark valley smoother than he found it himself. However, in his last moments, he expressed a renewed confidence in God's mercy through Christ, and died in peace. The old clergyman added, that he thought the Baron went through this conflict to humble him thoroughly; and, perhaps, to chastise him for having sometimes given way to a degree of self-complacence at the thoughts of his amazing parts, and of the respect they procured him from the learned world. He was obliged to become least in his own eyes, that he might become first and truly great in the sight of the Lord."

At the commencement of the year 1781, Geneva was harassed by popular commotions, occasioned by some disputes among three parties, into which that little republic was divided, under the names of *Negatifs*, *Representans*, and *Natifs*. Mr. Fletcher alludes to this circumstance in a letter written on the 14th of February. "I am here," says he, "in the midst of the rumours of war. The burghers of Geneva, on the side of the opposition, have disarmed the garrison, and taken possession of one of the gates. I had, however, the happiness to get in, and bring away my nephew, who is a student there. Some troops are preparing to go and block them up. This event may a little retard my journey, as I must pass through Geneva. It also puts off the printing my manuscript: for there is nothing going on in that unhappy town but disputes, and fights, and mounting of guards."

We can readily conceive that these civil commotions deeply affected Mr. Fletcher; and can scarcely refrain from regretting that he did not live to revisit this city, so near to the town of his nativity, and the scene of his early studies, under its present prosperous circumstances. After a long series of misfortunes in which every class of its inhabitants was involved, and a subjection of fifteen years' duration to a foreign yoke; after having been signally preserved by a kind providence in the midst of the most critical circumstances, Geneva has again arisen to its ancient independence, and its stability has been confirmed by its union to Switzerland in the character of a distinct canton. The pretexts for civil dissensions are no longer in existence, while the public spirit, patriotism, and political union of its inhabitants, were never more vigorous or sincere than at the present day. Let us hope that the Genevese will ever pay that tribute of gratitude which is due to the Sovereign author of so many benefits, and that the light of divine truth will shine with redoubled lustre among them, after a season of such portentous darkness.*

In the beginning of March, 1781, Mr. Fletcher took a final leave of Switzerland, and proceeded to the south of France, where he was engaged to meet his friend, Mr. Ireland, and to return with him from thence to England. Nothing particular is known of his journey, except that during the short time he stopped at Montpellier he somewhat impaired his health by too great exertion in the pulpit; and on their arrival at Paris, his attendance on a sick person would have brought on him the censure of an intolerant church, had not Mr. Ireland, who was mistaken for him by the police officers, quietly suffered them to remain in their error, until Mr. Fletcher, who was apprised of his danger, had proceeded too far on his journey to be overtaken. The friends afterwards joined each other, and arrived safely in England in the middle of April, after an absence of three years and four months.

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* *Post tenebras lux,* is the motto of the arms of Geneva.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS MARRIAGE—CHARACTERISTIC ANECDOTES—VISIT TO IRELAND.

About the time of Mr. Fletcher's taking orders he became acquainted with Miss Bosanquet, a young lady of respectable family and eminent piety; and one who in age, temper, and acquirements, appeared well calculated to make him a suitable partner for life. From their first acquaintance they were deeply sensible of each other's worth, and felt the secret influence of a mutual attachment. But Mr. Fletcher's deep humility led him to despair of the accomplishment of his wishes; and his dread of finding in any other woman a hindrance rather than an aid to his piety and usefulness, gave him, for a long time, a distaste to matrimony.

For many years after this period little or no intercourse subsisted between them, though both were zealously engaged in the cause of religion. While he was exhausting his strength in the service of his flock, she was no less sedulously employed in devoting her time and fortune to the relief and instruction of the indigent and helpless. In these occupations they spent the prime of their days, rejoicing in the occasional accounts they had of each other's labours, without, however, entering into any immediate correspondence.

Towards the close of his last visit to his native country, his attention was again directed to the subject of marriage. "I have been so well," said he, "that my friends have thought of giving me a wife: but what should I do with a Swiss wife at Madeley? I want rather an English nurse, but more still a mighty Saviour; and thanks be to God that I have one. Help me to rejoice in that never dying, never changing Friend." While, however, he objected to a Swiss lady, merely as such, he seems to have admitted the propriety of their general reasonings; and, accordingly, a few weeks after his return to England, he renewed his acquaintance with Miss Bosanquet, and made her an offer of marriage. During the visits which he now paid her in Yorkshire, his conversation with all around him was highly edifying, and his deportment most exemplary. Renewed health, lively spirits, and the prospect of his approaching union, greatly contributed to the happy state of his mind at this period, and pleasingly exemplified the connexion which subsists between exalted piety and substantial happiness.

The following verse of a hymn was frequently on his lips, whilst his animated manner and expressive countenance plainly showed that every chord of his heart harmonized with the expression:—

"Still, O my soul, prolong
The never-ceasing song;

Christ my theme, my hope, my joy:
His be all my happy days.
Praise my every hour employ:
Every breath be spent in praise."

It was during this period that Miss Ritchie, the present excellent Mrs. Mortimer of Islington, was first introduced to him. She had just returned from the Hot Wells, Bristol, where she had been for her health: their complaints had been similar, and both were much restored. Taking her kindly by the hand, Mr. Fletcher addressed her in those blessed words of our Lord, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."—"Sister, this is language with which you and I, and all that have been long walking around their own graves, ought to be very conversant." He then spoke to two other persons who were introduced to him, and turning again to Miss Ritchie, he added, "Sister, there is one article of our christian faith which all that have weak bodies ought to dwell much upon, that is, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body.'" He then enlarged for a considerable time on the privileges which the believer will enjoy at that day, when death shall be swallowed up in victory.

Monday, November 12th, was the day of his marriage, and was kept in a manner perfectly suitable to the very eminent piety of the parties.

A few weeks after their union, speaking of Mrs. Fletcher, he said in a letter to a friend, "I have now a new call to pray for a fullness of Christ's holy, gentle, meek, loving spirit, that I may love my wife as he loved his spouse, the Church. But the emblem is greatly deficient: the Lamb is worthy of his spouse, and more than worthy; whereas I must acknowledge myself unworthy of the yoke-fellow whom heaven has reserved for me. She is a person after my own heart; and I make no doubt we shall increase the number of the happy marriages in the church militant. Buried together in our country village, we shall help one another to trim our lamps, and wait, as I trust you do, continually, for the coming of the heavenly bridegroom."

From this period Mr. Fletcher considered himself as possessed of the last possible addition to his earthly happiness; never mentioning the memorable event of his marriage, without expressions of extraordinary gratitude to the God of all his mercies. And to the other parts of his character from this period must be added that of an attentive and affectionate husband, which he maintained with a becoming mixture of dignity and kindness to the day of his death.

By her natural disposition and devotional habits, Mrs. Fletcher was peculiarly suited to a state of the most entire and intimate fellowship with this eminent servant of God. She was ten years younger than himself, of equal standing with him in the school of Christ; she had drank of the same spirit, was actuated by the same zeal, and prepared in every respect to accompany him in the christian race. By her discretion and prudence she bore the whole weight of his domestic cares; while, by the natural activity of her mind, and her deep acquaintance with divine things, she seconded his ministerial labours with astonishing success. In their separate stations they had long been distinguished as lights in a dark place; and, after their union, they shone with redoubled lustre, dissipating the shades of prejudice which many had entertained against the truths of the gospel, and exemplifying the power and beauty of vital christianity.

"How shall I find language," said Mrs. Fletcher, "to express the goodness of the Lord! Not one of the good things have failed me of all the Lord my God hath spoken. Now I know no want, but that of more grace. I have such a husband as is in every thing suited to me. He bears with all my faults and failings in a manner that continually reminds me of that word, 'Love your wives as Christ loved the Church.' His constant endeavour is to make me happy; his strongest desire my spiritual growth. He is, in every sense of the word, the man my highest reason chooses to obey."

Many months afterwards she adds, "No words can express the treasure I possess in our union. It is such as I had no idea was to be enjoyed in a marriage state; and in proportion as I get nearer to God, I find a daily increase of that union;—and yet I am enabled so to give him up to the Lord, that it holds my soul in a quiet dependence and sweet adherence to the will of God."

It has already been mentioned that Mr. Fletcher's family was both ancient and noble: but he was so silent on every subject which would be considered as doing him honour, that very few of his most intimate friends were acquainted with the circumstance. Even Mrs. Fletcher, for some time after her marriage, supposed that he was sprung from very low parentage.

One day, when, in the course of conversation, something led to a discussion of the value of birth and fortune, Mrs. Fletcher, probably from a delicacy of feeling for her husband, spoke with some contempt of such adventitious distinctions. "Surely, my love," said Mr. Fletcher, "you carry the matter too far; for though a christian will not be proud of birth and fortune, nor despise another for wanting them, yet they are real and great advantages, if we improve them aright. When we speak of a respectable family, we mean to include not only some portion of wealth and rank, but also moral worth, education, and polished manners. And how many and great are the advantages of spending our childhood and youth in the bosom of such a family, to say nothing of our happily escaping the many evils which attend humbler birth." "Well, my dear," said she, "you have got over the disadvantages of your humble birth." "You mistake," he replied; "my family is respectable; I enjoyed every advantage I could wish." "I thought," said she, "you had been the son of a common soldier." "How came you to think so?" "When I first saw you, many years ago, one of the company asked you what your father was, and you answered, My father was a soldier." "I now recollect it," said Mr. Fletcher; "and I said true, for my father was a General: not that I meant to conceal it, but I was then young in my English. I hesitated for a term; and, seeing a private pass the window, I pointed to him and said, My father was a soldier; meaning to designate his profession, and not his rank." "But, my dear," observed Mrs. Fletcher, "when you must have perceived our mistake by our astonishment, why did you not set us right?" "I certainly did perceive your innocent mistake," Mr. Fletcher replied, "but it was not worth while either for me or you to correct it."

A short time after this conversation took place, Mrs. Fletcher, while searching his desk for some paper, found a handsome seal. "Is this yours?" she inquired. "It is mine: but I have not used it for many years." "But why do you not use it?" "Had you examined it," said Mr. Fletcher, "you would not have asked the question. You see it bears a coronet, nearly such as is the insignia of your English nobility. Were I to use that seal, it might lead to frivolous inquiries about my family; and, what is worse, subject me to the censure of valuing myself on such distinctions."*

From the time of his marriage, Mr. Fletcher experienced no return of his consumptive symptoms.—His general health also appeared materially improved, and his strength so far re-established, as to enable him to perform the whole duty of his parish without the assistance of a curate.

Mr. Fletcher had long lamented the melancholy situation of poor uninstructed children; and had some years before established a day-school in his parish, which he regularly superintended during his residence at Madeley. He now determined to form a Sunday school. Institutions of this description, though at the present day almost universal, were at that period nearly confined to a few of the principal towns in the kingdom. Finding that the attempts which he made were attended with considerable success, he urged upon his parishioners the importance of raising a sufficient sum for the erection of a suitable building for a school, in addition to an annual subscription for defraying its current expenses.

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* The last intimation Mrs. Fletcher had of the respectability of her husband's family was received from one of his nephews, who visited England after the death of his uncle. "You know, aunt," said he, "that our family is allied to the house of Sardinia." "No, my dear, I never heard any thing about it." "That is strange," said the young man; "did my uncle never tell you that we were allied to the house of Sardinia?" "No, my dear," was the reply, "he did not; and he had so many good things to tell me, in which we both took so much interest, that it is not at all strange that he forgot to mention the house of Sardinia."

He prefaced his proposals on this occasion by observing, that our national depravity principally turned on these two hinges, the profanation of the Lord's-day, and the neglect of the education of children; and that, till some way was found out of stopping up these two great inlets to wickedness, we must expect to see our workhouses filled with aged parents deserted by their prodigal children, with wives forsaken by their faithless husbands, and with the wretched offspring of lewd women and drunken men. Nay, that we must expect to see our gaols largely stocked, to the perpetual reproach of our nation, with unhappy wretches, ready to fall a sacrifice to the laws of their country. He then held out, as the most probable remedy for these growing evils, the formation of Sunday schools; which, by keeping children from corrupting one another, by promoting their attendance on Divine worship, and by implanting the first principles of useful knowledge in their minds, bid fair for a public reformation of manners, and for nipping in the bud the ignorance and impiety which are every where so common among the lower classes of society. His proposals met with the general approbation and support of his parishioners; and in a short time he was gratified with the sight of a convenient schoolroom, which was erected in one of the most populous parts of his parish.

A short time before this period, the Rev. Melville Horne, then a youth of seventeen years of age, was first introduced to Mr. Fletcher. "Allow me, Sir," said his fond and pious mother, who accompanied him, "to present to you a young christian." The pious vicar received him with his wonted benignity; grasped his hand in both his own; and then, lifting up his eyes to heaven, fervently exclaimed, "My brother, may the Lord make you an *old christian!*"

The solemnity of the scene forcibly impressed the mind of his youthful guest, who, as often as circumstances would allow, repeated his visits to Madeley. He is himself now advancing in the vale of years: but the impressions he received from his early intercourse with Mr. Fletcher are still fresh in his memory, and deeply engraven in his heart. "On all these visits," says he, in a recent letter to the writer of the present work, "I derived the highest pleasure and edification. I not only had the opportunity of hearing many excellent sermons, but of seeing him in the privacies of life; and I know not which most to venerate, his public or private character. Grave and dignified in his deportment and manners, he yet excelled in all the courtesies and attentions of the accomplished gentleman. In every company he appeared as the least, the last, and the servant of all. From head to foot, he was clothed with humility; while the heavenly-mindedness of an angel shone from his countenance, and sparkled in his eyes. His religion was without labour, and without effort:—for christianity was not only his great business, but his very element and nature. As a mortal man, he doubtless had his errors and failings:—but what they were they who knew him best would find it difficult to say, for he appeared as an instrument of heavenly minstrelsy always attuned to the Master's touch.

"In no one point was he observedly defective. But what above all endeared him to my esteem, love, and veneration, was his personal and private conduct. He most excelled in that in which other christians are most defective; and this I conceive to be the reason why his friends speak of him with an ardour of affection, with a degree of veneration, almost bordering on adoration; with a feeling which I can compare only to that which we entertain for patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. In every view, he was a great man, and entitled to rank in the very first class of ministers: but it was his *goodness*, which, even in the ever blessed God is the acme of moral greatness, that raised him above all the ministers of his day. Never can we forget the sweet spirit and fire of piety his conversation kindled in our breasts, and which is rekindled and raised into a flame at every recollection or mention of his virtues. But I forget myself: you asked only for a few anecdotes of Mr. Fletcher; and without design, and before I was aware, I have been drawn in to give you a sketch of his character: a very imperfect and defective one; yet, as far as it goes, faithful and true. Defective, however, as it is, it will not escape the censure which has been passed upon all his biographers, that they have delineated his portrait as more than man; more at least than was seen in the best of his compatriots; and have been misled by the heated imagination of partial friendship, rather than followed the sober dictates of historical truth. For the general usefulness of your work, I wish you may escape the censure incurred by your predecessors: but your only chance of doing so is this,—you write of a man whom you did not know.

"On my occasional visits," continues Mr. Horne, "I was struck with several things. Preaching on Noah as a type of Christ, he was in the midst of a most animated description of the terrible day of the Lord, when he suddenly paused. Every feature of his expressive countenance was marked with painful feeling; and, striking his forehead with the palm of his hand, he exclaimed, 'Wretched man that I am! Beloved brethren, it often cuts me to the soul, as it does at this moment, to reflect, that while I have been endeavouring, by the force of truth, by the beauty of holiness, and even by the terrors of the Lord, to bring you to walk in the peaceable paths of righteousness, I am, with respect to many of you who reject the gospel, only tying mill-stones round your neck, to sink you deeper in perdition!' The whole church was electrified, and it was some time before he could resume his subject.

"On another occasion, after the morning service, he asked if any of the congregation could give him the address of a sick man whom he was desired to visit. He was answered, 'He is dead, Sir.' 'Dead! dead!' he exclaimed; 'another soul launched into eternity! What can I do for him now! Why, my friends, will you so frequently serve me in this manner? I am not informed you are ill, till I find you dying, or hear that you are dead.' Then sitting down, he covered his head with his gown; and, when the congregation had retired, he walked home buried in sorrow, as though he had lost a friend or a brother.

"One New-Year's day Gilbert and myself dined with him, as did also a pious young man and his wife. After he had entertained us with much pious and instructive conversation, as we all stood around the fire, and were ready to separate, he took Gilbert's hand and mine, and joined them together. 'You two young men,' said he, 'are united by blood, by friendship, by your common destination to the blessed service of the sanctuary.' Then turning to the young man and his wife, 'Do you also, whom God hath joined in the tenderest of earthly bonds, join your hands, and I will take that of my beloved wife. And now what shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits? What blessings have we received! What mercies have followed us the last year! This is the first day of a new year. Let us give our whole soul to God. Let us start afresh on the road to immortality; and, forgetting the things that are behind, let us press towards the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.' Then lifting his eyes to heaven for three or four minutes, he prayed for us most fervently and affectionately.

"All of Mr. Fletcher's opponents were able, and most of them humorous writers. This circumstance frequently obliged him, contrary to the habitual gravity of his character, to encounter them with their own weapons; and this perhaps made him pass for a *bitter* writer with those who could not bear to see their own sentiments treated with the same freedom with which they treated those of a contrary description. They who wish to judge according to truth would do well to read Mr. Fletcher's works before they censure him; and to bear in mind that the respect due to truth will justify a degree of freedom with doctrinal opinions, which esteem and love will not allow towards the persons of their advocates. I will not recriminate on his respectable opponents; but relate an anecdote which will exhibit his patience and gentleness under severe and rude censures. When apparently in dying circumstances at Bristol, a Dissenting minister called upon him. Though he had been forbidden to converse, and the gentleman was a stranger, Mr. Fletcher admitted and received him with his usual courtesy. But the visitor, instead of conversing on such subjects as were suitable to Mr. Fletcher's christian character and afflicted circumstances, entered warmly on controversy; and told him, 'He had better have been confined to his bed with a dead palsy, than have written so many bitter things against the dear children of God.' 'My brother,' said Mr. Fletcher, 'I hope I have not been bitter. Certainly I did not mean to be so: but I wanted more love then, and I feel I want more now.' This mild answer silenced him; and sent him away, I trust, better acquainted with Mr. Fletcher's spirit, and his own. They are not generally of the best spirit themselves, who are first to complain of the spirit of their opponents.

"In contests of humility, kindness, and affection, it was impossible to overcome Mr. Fletcher. Every one who knew him can produce instances of this kind. I shall mention only a few. The Rev. Moseley Cheek had once been preaching in his parish; and on their way home, in a dark night, and in a deep dirty road, Mr. Fletcher carefully held the lanthorn to him, while he himself walked through the mire. Pained to see his senior and superior so employed, he made fruitless attempts to take the lanthorn from him. 'What, my brother,' said Mr. Fletcher, 'have you been holding up the glorious light of the gospel, and will you not permit me to hold this dim taper to your feet?' His friend, the Rev. Mr. Gilpin, perceiving a funeral waiting at the church-gate, took the surplice, and commenced the service: but he had hardly got into the desk, when Mr. Fletcher, who had been visiting a sick person, came into the church; and gently drawing away a lad who was officiating in the absence of the clerk, took his place, and acted as clerk to Mr. Gilpin. When the service was ended, he observed, that he 'could not bear to see the place of an inferior servant of the church improperly filled up, without attempting to supply it himself with a greater degree of decorum and reverence.'"

Some of these anecdotes may at first sight appear too minute, too trivial, for publication: but when it is considered that they are highly descriptive of his general demeanour, it will probably be allowed that a Life of Fletcher would be incomplete without them. "The physiognomy," observes Rousseau, "does not show itself in great features, nor the character in great actions: it is in trifles that the natural disposition discovers itself." It is from this impression, that the following anecdote is annexed from the work of his official biographer. "While Mr. Fletcher continued tutor at Tern Hall, he usually attended the church of the Rev. Mr. Cartwright, a man of whose piety and zeal he made frequent and honourable mention. It was the custom of this gentleman frequently to catechise in public the children of his parish. And on one of these occasions he requested that no person of maturer age, who stood in need of instruction, would esteem it a disgrace to appear in the number of the catechumens. When no one had condescension enough to occupy so mean a station, Mr. Fletcher left his seat; and, with an air of unaffected modesty, took his place among the children."

In the summer of 1783, Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher, in compliance with the very earnest solicitations of some Irish friends, spent a few weeks in Dublin. "As we drove from our own door," says Mrs. Fletcher, "and my dear husband was commending us to the protection of the Lord, that word rested on my mind with power, 'I am thy shield.' When we passed the Birches, where a few years ago that remarkable phenomenon occurred, Mr. Fletcher pointed out to me the roads and fields which were so lately covered with the river.

We could not but be much amazed at the stupidity of the human heart. Most of the inhabitants seem almost to have forgotten the whole transaction! And we were led to observe, how vain is the common objection to the miracles of our Lord, or to the sun's standing still at Joshua's word, that they are not recorded in common history. Ah no! That which does not take hold on the sinful affections is soon lost and forgotten! While we were conversing on the above subject, we passed Eaton-Constadine, a little village rendered famous by the birth of that great servant of God, Mr. Baxter, with whose spirit we joined our feeble act of worship before the throne.

"At night we were affectionately received by Mrs. Glynne, of Shrewsbury, whose love to the children of God does not grow cold. May he, who hath promised the prophet's reward, repay her in time and eternity. While my dear husband was preaching that night, on the danger of being 'ashamed of the gospel,' my heart yearned towards the people of that place; and the cry of my spirit was, 'O that these people might live before Thee.'"

Towards the conclusion of this sermon, Mr. Fletcher stated his sentiments respecting the eminent degree of holiness to which a christian might attain in this life. All the ministers of the place attended to hear him; and all but one remained to shake him by the hand after the service. That one was the principal clergyman, a polished gentleman, and an old acquaintance. In the morning Mr. Fletcher, who suspected no offence, said to Mr. Gilbert, "I had not the pleasure last night of shaking hands with my friend

Mr. ——. I cannot think of quitting the town without seeing him. As you are acquainted with him, perhaps you will walk with me." They, accordingly, called; and were introduced: but when he presented his hand with his usual respectful cordiality, it was rudely declined. "I never preach any thing," said his friend, "but what I experience. Do you, Mr. Fletcher, experience that eminent degree of holiness, that *christian perfection,* which you spoke of last night?" Unprepared for discussion, especially with an angry disputant, he answered mildly, "My dear brother, we serve the same blessed Lord;—why then should we disagree, because our liveries are not turned up exactly alike?" Finding his friend still rude and repulsive, he suddenly caught his hand; kissed it; and, bowing low, said, "God bless you, my brother," and retired. It is creditable to the religious principles of this gentleman, that Mr. Fletcher's patient kindness was not without effect. On his return from Ireland his friend called upon him, apologized for his conduct in the handsomest terms, and treated him with the most respectful distinction.

The next morning they pursued their journey as far as Llangollen in Wales. To their inquiry, as they walked about the town, whether there were any pious people in the place, one of the inhabitants informed them that some persons met together for prayer at the other end of the town, but he did not know any thing about them. "This very night," said another, "a man will preach to these praying people." Accordingly they went to the place, where they found a few poor people collected together in an antiquated building. The preacher manifested the characteristic fervour of his nation: but their ignorance of the language prevented their understanding anything he said, except *ogoniant* and *gwaed,* glory and blood, which he often repeated with peculiar emphasis. On their return to the inn, a few persons who understood English, requested Mr. Fletcher to preach to them in the morning; which he did from these words, "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he hath given us commandment." They then set off for Conway; on Friday afternoon reached Holyhead; and about one o'clock on Sunday morning they cast anchor three miles from Dublin.

During their continuance in Dublin, Mr. Fletcher's public and private exhortations were attended with a remarkable blessing. Numbers of careless persons were awakened to a sense of the importance of divine things, and the general tone of religion was evidently raised among the more serious characters with whom he conversed. "We now abide," says Mrs. Fletcher, "with our hospitable friends, Mr. and Mrs. Smyth, in William street, and have seen much of the Lord's hand in bringing us hither. My dear husband has been favoured with such an unction in preaching the word, that it distils 'as the dew upon the mown grass.' The preachers are truly simple pious men; and respect that command, 'In honour preferring one another.' They heartily rejoice in the message my dear husband delivers among them. Our kind and generous host and hostess too, allow us all freedom in their house, for the glory of God and the good of his people; and as their servants also are pious upright persons, we can here worship with them in calm and brotherly love." During this period he frequently preached at the French church in Dublin, which was attended by the descendants of the persecuted Huguenots. The first time he preached there he selected for his text,—*Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;* Hebrews x. 32. From whence he took occasion to refer to the sufferings and piety of their ancestors, and to enforce upon them the necessity of self-examination. Amongst his hearers were some persons who were totally unacquainted with the French language. Being questioned respecting the motives for their attendance, they instantly replied, "We went to *look* at him, for heaven seemed to beam from his countenance." This anecdote is so far interesting, as adding one testimony to innumerable others, of the deep impression which his amiable manners and heavenly countenance made upon the minds of all who saw him.

The last morning he passed at Dublin, some friends who were aware of his very limited income, earnestly pressed him to accept of a small purse, not as a present, but as a debt justly due to him, for the expenses he had incurred on his journey. For a long time he declined their offer: but at length, finding them exceedingly importunate, he took the purse in his hand. "Well," said he, "do you really force it upon me? Must I accept of it? Is it entirely mine? And may I do with it as I please?" "Yes, yes," they all replied. "God be praised," said he, raising his eyes to heaven. "Behold what a mercy is here? Your Poor's fund was just out; I heard some of you complaining that it was never so low before. Take this purse; God has sent it to you, raised it among yourselves, and bestowed it upon your poor. You cannot deny me. It is sacred to them. God be praised! I heartily thank you, my dear kind brethren."

In compliance with Mr. Wesley's reiterated requests, Mr. Fletcher was sometimes present at his annual Conference, when his sermons and pious conversation became the theme of every tongue. On one of these occasions he was desired to pronounce the sentence of expulsion against a preacher; and he performed this delicate and painful duty with such a happy mixture of solemnity, feeling, and affection, accompanied with such awful and pathetic warnings, as drew tears from every eye. At the same Conference he preached a sermon on the old prophet, who beguiled the man of God that came from Judah; in which he drew such a pathetic picture of the personal degradation and misery of a backsliding minister, and of the corruption and injury he introduced into the church of Christ, as produced a general and deep sensation, not easily to be forgotten.

At the last Conference he attended, when Mr. Wesley was about to read over his own name, and those of all the preachers, that any present might object to whatever was deemed reprehensible in them, Mr. Fletcher rose to withdraw. He was eagerly recalled, and asked why he would leave them. "Because," said he, "it is improper and painful to my feelings for me to hear the minute failings of my brethren canvassed, unless my own character were submitted to the same scrutiny." They promised, if he would stay, that his character should be investigated. On these terms he submitted; and, when his name was read, an aged preacher rose, bowed to him, and said, "I have but one thing to object to Mr. Fletcher: God has given him a richer talent than his humility will suffer him duly to appreciate. In confining himself to Madeley, he puts his light comparatively under a bushel; whereas, if he would come out more among us, he would draw immense congregations, and would do much more good." In answer to this he stated the tender and sacred ties which bound him to his parish; its numerous population; the daily calls for his services; the difficulty of finding a proper substitute; his increasing infirmities, which disqualified him for horse-exercise; his unwillingness to leave Mrs. Fletcher at home; and the expense of travelling in carriages. In reply to his last argument, another preacher arose, and observed, that the expense of his journeys would be cheerfully paid; and that, though he knew and highly approved of Mr. Fletcher's disinterestedness and delicacy in pecuniary transactions, yet he feared there was a mixture of pride in his objection, for that by no importunity could he be prevailed on to accept a present to defray his expenses on his late visit to Ireland. "A little explanation," replied Mr. Fletcher, with his characteristic meekness, "will set that matter right. When I was so kindly invited to visit my friends at Dublin, I had every desire to accept their invitation: but I wanted money for the journey, and knew not how to obtain it. In this situation I laid the matter before the Lord, humbly requesting that, if the journey were a providential opening to do good, I might have the means of performing it. Shortly afterwards I received an unexpected sum of money, and took my journey. While in Dublin, I heard our friends commiserating the distresses of the poor, and lamenting the inadequate means they had to relieve them. When, therefore, they offered me a handsome present,—what could I do? The necessary expenses of my journey had already been supplied; my general income was quite sufficient; I needed nothing. Had I received the money, I should have given it away. The poor of Dublin most needed, and were most worthy of, the money of their generous countrymen. How then could I hesitate to beg it might be applied to their relief? You see, brethren, I could not in conscience do otherwise than I did."

But it was a sense of duty, rather than choice, which occasionally drew Mr. Fletcher from his own neighbourhood. He would willingly have lived and died among his people; and after every little excursion, he returned with increasing pleasure to his parish, and to the superintendance of his flock.

The account he gave of himself about this time, is sobeautiful and characteristic, that it would be an injury to the reader to give it in any words but his own. "I keep," says he, "in my sentry-box till Providence remove me; my situation is quite suited to my little strength. I may do as much or as little as I please, according to my weakness. And I have an advantage which I can have nowhere else, in such a degree: my little field of action is just at my door; so that, if I happen to overdo myself, I have but a step from my pulpit to my bed, and from my bed to my grave. If I had a body full of vigour, and a purse full of money, I should like well enough to travel about as Mr. Wesley does: but, as Providence does not call me to it, I readily submit. The snail does best in its shell. My wife is quite of my mind with respect to the call we have to a sedentary life. We are two poor invalids, who, between us, make half a labourer. She sweetly helps me to drink the dregs of life, and to carry with ease the daily cross. Neither of us are long for this world: we see it, we feel it; and, by looking at death and his conqueror, we fight beforehand our last battle with that last enemy, whom our dear Lord hath overcome for us."

In the meantime nothing seemed hard, nothing wearisome to him, which tended to produce the good of his neighbours. Mrs. Fletcher was frequently grieved to call him out of his study two or three times in an hour; especially when she knew he was engaged in some important work. But on such occasions he would answer, with his usual piety, "O, my dear, never mind. It matters not, if we are but ready to meet the will of God. It is conformity to His will alone that makes any employment excellent." No occupation ever appeared to him mean, or beneath his character, which was not sinful. If he overtook a poor person on the road, with a burden too heavy for him, he did not fail to offer his assistance to bear part of it; and, under such circumstances, he would not easily take a denial. To persons unacquainted with Mr. Fletcher, such instances might seem to border upon a voluntary and ostentatious humility: but no one who was intimate with him would attribute them to any other cause than that eminent simplicity of heart, which was one of the most prominent features in his character.

No employment of Mrs. Fletcher's seemed more pleasing to him than when she was engaged in preparing food or medicine for the poor. On Sundays he provided for numbers of poor people who came to his church from a distance; for his house, as well as his heart, was devoted to their convenience. Indeed, he scarcely seemed ever to enjoy his meals, unless he knew that some sick or indigent neighbour should partake of them. But, with all his generosity, he was still careful to live within his income. And as a means of effecting this, it was his custom to pay for everything when he purchased it; considering at the same time that this method was best calculated to keep his mind disencumbered, and free from perplexing cares. In short, his property, his time, his all, might be considered as consecrated to the service of his flock.

Thus quietly glided away the last years of this excellent man; blessed in himself, and an eminent blessing to all around him. "As he approached the end of his course," said Mr. Gilpin, "the graces he had kept in continual exercise for so long a season became more illustrious and powerful: his faith was more assured, his hope more lively, his charity more abundant, his humility more profound, and his resignation more complete. To those who were intimately conversant with him at this season, he appeared as a scholar of the highest attainments in the school of Christ; or, rather, as a regenerate spirit in his latest state of preparation for the kingdom of God: and this extraordinary eminence in grace was discoverable in him, not from any high external professions of sanctity, but from that meekness of wisdom, that purity of conversation, and lowliness of mind, by which his whole carriage was uniformly distinguished."

CHAPTER IX.

HIS LAST ILLNESS—DEATH—CHARACTER.

A FEW weeks before the commencement of his last illness, Mr. Fletcher was peculiarly penetrated with a sense of the nearness of the eternal world. There was scarcely an hour in which he was not calling upon those around him to drop every worldly thought and care, and to prepare for the coming of the Lord. "I know not how it is," said he to Mrs. Fletcher, "but I have a strong impression, death is near us, as if it were to be some sudden stroke upon one of us. And it draws out all my soul in prayer, that we may be ready. Lord, prepare the soul thou wilt call. And O stand by the poor disconsolate one that shall be left behind."

A recent illness of Mrs. Fletcher, no doubt, increased these serious impressions. "A week ago," said he, "I was tried to the quick by a fever, with which my dear wife was afflicted: two persons whom she had visited having been carried off, within a pistol shot of our house, I dreaded her being the third. But the Lord hath heard prayer; and she is spared. O what is life! On what a slender thread hang everlasting things! My comfort, however is, that this thread is as strong as the will of God, and the word of His grace, which cannot be broken."

During this period he frequently reminded Mrs. Fletcher of the severe conflicts which a late friend of theirs, an eminently pious minister of Christ, had experienced in his last hours. And as often as he adverted to this mysterious providence, he uniformly added, "Well, my love, let us think only of a holy life. As for the manner of our death, let us leave all to Him, who will do all things well."

But it is here necessary to mention the following circumstances, in order to form an adequate idea of his feelings on this subject. Mr. Fletcher had many years before observed, in one of his sermons, that a godly life was the way to a happy death; and that, in general, it might be admitted, that the consolation of our death would be in proportion to the piety of our lives. Nevertheless, he continued, that this, like all general rules, had its exceptions. Some good men were severely tried and tempted in their latter end, and this might be for more reasons than he could assign. The mortal machine might be partially or totally deranged. God might chastise former infidelities: he might suffer an eminent saint even to be tried to the utmost, for greater purification here, and to enhance his weight of glory; or he might do it to secure the honour of his grace, and to show that he was debtor to none,—as well to discourage presumptuous claims for ourselves and others, as to prevent rash condemnations of such good men as died less comfortably than we wished, and might have expected. Hence it was safer, wiser, and more scriptural, to judge of good men by the tenor of a godly life, than by the peculiar circumstances of their death. These statements appeared to his friend, who was then present, liable to serious objections. "I think," said he, "that in supposing that the Lord may permit his most faithful servants to be so severely tried, and even perhaps to die under a cloud, your doctrine is not only discouraging to the pious, but even bears hard upon the goodness and mercy of God our Saviour. I wish, on reflection, you could retract it." "My dear brother," answered Mr. Fletcher, "I defer much to your better judgment; and would gladly retract it, if I could do so with a safe conscience. God is good to all: but, as Sovereign, he gives more or less, where and when he pleases. Even as a righteous Judge, his understanding is unsearchable, and his ways beyond the reach of our thought. What we know not now, we shall know hereafter; and though a righteous man die under the most afflictive circumstances, doubtless it shall work for good." His friend, who was still dissatisfied with Mr. Fletcher's statements, was about a year after attacked by a mortal disease; and from a variety of circumstances, none of which impeached his character as a christian, was overwhelmed with the deepest discouragement and dejection. It is not improbable that the recollection of his conversation with Mr. Fletcher, and of his own undue confidence, added to his disquietude. At length, in his expiring moments, his pale afflicted countenance assumed the aspect of angelic joy: he clasped his hands, and exclaimed, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his;" and died.

Under these circumstances it is not remarkable that Mr. Fletcher, as appears in a letter printed in his posthumous pieces, was beyond measure amazed at the manner of the death of this pious friend; while his implicitly submitting to the good pleasure of God every circumstance connected with his own dissolution—equally regardless of personal pain, and of posthumous reputation,—affords a remarkable evidence of the most complete resignation to the will of heaven.

The termination of his life and labours was indeed nearly at hand; and no less happy was he in the triumphal close of his mortal existence, (far beyond what his humble mind had ever dared to promise to himself,) than in the accomplishment of his wish as to the occasion of his death. When an infectious fever had once been in his parish, and its ravages had intimidated even some of his pious flock from performing the offices of humanity and christian charity, he had reproved them to this effect:—"If the children of this world forsake their sick and dying friends from the fear of infection, I am not surprised. Their portion is in this world, and whatever menaces their life strikes at their all. But when christians, who profess to have their lives hid with Christ in God, are guilty of the same pusillanimous conduct, I am exceedingly astonished; for such conduct is a dereliction of the faith, hope, love, and every other principle of our holy religion. To what end hath Christ died and risen again, if his disciples, like other men, are to be in perpetual bondage to the fear of death? No, my brethren; use every precaution prudence can suggest;

meekly, but confidently, commit yourselves to the gracious Power in whom you live; and then, without fear, stand firm to the calls of duty. Devolve all consequences upon him, who careth for you. We cannot die until he calls for our lives, and his time and way are the wisest and best. For myself, whenever I shall have numbered the days he may appoint, I shall deem it an additional honour and blessing, if he should appoint me to meet my death while I am engaged in the kind offices of humanity and mercy."

On Thursday, August 4, Mr. Fletcher was engaged in visiting several sick persons, and in other ministerial duties, from three in the afternoon till nine at night. When he came home, he said that he had taken cold, but did not appear to apprehend any serious consequences. The next day he was far from being well, and on Saturday it was evident that a considerable degree of fever had been induced. No persuasion, however, could prevail upon him to stay from church on the Sunday, or even to permit that any part of the service should be performed for him. It was the will of the Lord, he said, that he should go; and he assured his wife and friends that God would strengthen him to go through the duties of the day.

He began the service with apparent strength: but before he had proceeded far, his countenance changed, his speech faultered, and he could scarcely keep himself from fainting. The congregation was greatly affected and alarmed; and Mrs. Fletcher, pressing through the crowd, earnestly entreated him not to persevere in attempting what was so evidently beyond his strength. He recovered, however, when the windows were opened; and, exerting himself against the mortal illness which he felt, he went through the service, and preached with remarkable energy. Mercy was the subject of his discourse; and while he expatiated on this glorious attribute of the Deity, its unsearchable extent, its eternal duration, and its astonishing effects, he seemed to be raised above all the fears and feelings of humanity. His appearance and manner gave an irresistible influence to his words, for his hearers plainly saw that the hand of death was upon him.

As soon as he had finished his sermon, he walked to the communion table. Here the same affecting scene was renewed with additional solemnity. Tears started from every eye, and sighs escaped from every breast, while his people beheld their minister offering up the last languid remains of a life that had been lavishly spent in their service. In going through this last part of his duty, he was frequently exhausted: but his spiritual vigour triumphed over his bodily weakness. At length, after having struggled through a service of some hours' continuance, he was supported, with blessings in his mouth, from the altar to his chamber, where he lay some time in a swoon, and from whence he never walked into the world again. Mr. Fletcher's friends entered so entirely into his devotional feelings, that they were spared the bitter pang which they would otherwise have experienced from the reflection that these imprudent exertions exasperated his disorder, and proved an acceleration of his death.

The death-bed of this excellent man presented to those who were permitted to witness it, a scene equally instructive with any part of his previous life. As the mercy of God, through Christ, had been his delightful theme while in health, so was it now his support and consolation in death. His reliance was not placed in any state of christian experience to which he had arrived, nor in any habit of consistent holiness in which he had been enabled to live; it was founded simply and solely on the efficacy of the merits and atonement of the Redeemer.

Mrs. Fletcher mentions that he manifested peculiar pleasure during his illness, whenever he repeated or heard the following lines:—

> " While Jesu's blood through earth and skies
> Mercy, free boundless mercy, cries;"

And that he would frequently add,—"Yes, boundless,—boundless—boundless."

> " Mercy's *full* power I soon shall prove,
> Lov'd with an everlasting love."

The solicitude which he felt for others during this period of his own extreme suffering manifests how largely he partook of the same mind, which was also in Christ Jesus. His parish, his family, his friends, all shared in his sympathies, and in his dying prayers. The indigent and afflicted part of his parishioners, who had so long experienced his tender care, still occupied his peculiar attention. When he could not speak without great pain and difficulty, he pathetically cried out—*O, my poor; what will become of my* *poor?"*—and he could only find rest in his tender and affectionate spirit, by calmly committing them to the Lord. While his pious and endeared wife was kneeling by his side, with his hand enclosed in hers, he repeatedly strove to comfort her by broken half-articulated expressions of tenderness and love. And when the powers of speech failed him, he intimated to her by expressive signs, the happiness which he felt in his God. At length, calling to his aid all his remaining powers, he piously breathed out—"*Head of the Church, be Head of my wife.*" His female attendant having said to him, "Oh, my dear master, should you be taken away, what a disconsolate creature will my poor dear mistress be,"—he checked her fears; and attempted to dissipate her doubts, by reminding her, with mingled affection and confidence, that God would be her All in all.

For his medical attendant also, whose kind assiduities he gratefully felt, but whose neglect of eternal things had excited within him deep concern, he discovered the most affecting anxiety. "O Sir," he would say, even when he had scarcely any power to speak;—"O Sir, you take much thought for my body, permit me to take thought for your soul."

His sufferings during his illness were at times very acute and diversified: but he was raised completely above them. Mrs. Fletcher describes him as bearing all with such unutterable patience as no one, unless he were present, could possibly conceive. If at any time she spoke of his sufferings, he would only smile, and intimate his inward tranquillity and joy.

His general attainments in Divine things had long been of a very exalted kind. His uncommon power over sin, his habitual recollection, his uninterrupted communion with God, together with his extensive enjoyment of the graces and consolations of the Holy Spirit, had, for many years, marked him out as a christian of no ordinary standard. But towards the close of his life he was in the habit of expecting a yet greater fulness of spiritual enjoyments. The following lines, expressive of his desires, were frequently uttered by him as the language of his ardent mind:—

"Stretch my faith's capacity
Wider and yet wider still;
Then with all that is in Thee
My soul for ever fill."—Eph. iii. 19.

And in answer to these his pious breathings he seemed, for a short time previous to his death, to have lived within the very precincts of the celestial world.

Mr. Gilpin, with his usual felicity of expression, thus adverts to this his happy and triumphant state of mind:—"A few days before his dissolution he appeared to have reached that desirable point, where the last rapturous discoveries are made to the souls of dying saints. Roused, as it were, with the shouts of angels, and kindled into rapture with visions of glory, he broke forth into a song of holy triumph, which began and ended with the praises of God's unfathomable love. He laboured to declare the secret manifestations he enjoyed: but his sensations were too powerful for utterance; and, after *looking* inexpressible things, he contented himself with calling upon all around him to celebrate that adorable love which can never be fully comprehended, nor adequately expressed. This triumphant frame of mind was not a transient feeling, but a state that he continued to enjoy, with little or no discernible interruption, to the moment of his death. While he possessed the power of speech, he spake as one whose lips had been touched with a *live coal from the altar;* and, when deprived of that power, his countenance discovered that he was secretly engaged in the contemplation of eternal things."

Thus passed away the first six days of Mr. Fletcher's illness. On the following Sunday earnest supplications were offered up, in the house of God, for his recovery, whilst an air of solemn sadness pervaded the whole village. Hasty messengers were seen passing to and fro with anxious inquiries and confused reports; and the members of every family awaited, with trembling expectation, the issue of every hour. After the evening service several of the poor, who came from a distance, and were usually entertained under his roof, lingered about the house, and at length expressed an earnest desire to be permitted once more to behold their expiring pastor. Their request was granted. The door of his chamber was set open: directly opposite to which he was sitting upright in bed, unaltered in his appearance; and as they slowly passed along the gallery, one by one, they paused at the door, with a look of mingled supplication and anguish.

A few hours after this affecting scene he breathed his last, without a struggle or a groan. At the moment of his departure Mrs. Fletcher was kneeling by his side; a domestic, who had attended him with an uncommon assiduity, was seated at his head; and his respected friend, Mr. Gilpin, was sorrowfully standing near his feet. Uncertain whether he had actually expired, they pressed near, and hung over his bed in the attitude of listening attention. His lips had ceased to move, and his head was gently sinking upon his bosom. They stretched out their hands: but his warfare was accomplished, and his happy spirit had taken its everlasting flight. Such was the end of this eminently holy and laborious servant of God, who entered into his rest on the evening of Sunday, August 14, 1785, in the fifty-sixth year of his age. "Three years, nine months, and two days," said his disconsolate widow, "I have possessed my heavenly-minded husband. But now the sun of my earthly joys is set for ever, and my soul filled with an anguish, which only finds its consolation in a total resignation to the will of God."

Mr. Fletcher had frequently expressed an earnest desire that he might be buried in the plainest manner possible. "Let there be no pomp," he would say, "no expense, no ceremony, at my funeral. The coffin of the parish poor will suit me best." To these instructions his affectionate widow religiously adhered. A plain oak coffin, with a steel plate, conveyed his honoured remains to their long home, without a pall, pall-bearers, scarf, or hat-band. But two thousand of his parishioners followed him to the grave, who manifested, by all the signs of unaffected sorrow, their affliction for their irreparable loss.

As to the person of this great and good man,—he was above the middle stature, strongly built, and well proportioned. The contour of his face was interesting and noble; his eye was active and penetrating; his nose was moderately aqueline; and his whole countenance such as peculiarly accorded with the extraordinary grace and elevation of his character. His deportment and manners were of the most engaging and courteous kind, presenting such a combination of gravity, condescension, and gentleness, as few have ever witnessed. Humility and dignity are seldom seen familiarly associated in the same person: but in this master of Israel they grew together in so exact a proportion that, while he everywhere exhibited a sort of angelic superiority in his air, his carriage, and his conversation, that superiority was inseparably blended with all the meekness and simplicity of a little child.

His figure was wonderfully adapted to all the sacred offices he had to perform: but of his appearance in the pulpit it may especially be said, that the liveliest fancy could not frame for any of the ancient saints an aspect more venerable or apostolic.

Having followed this holy and exemplary man through the interesting and instructive scenes of his pious and laborious life, and having likewise attended him to its solemn and affecting close, it may be well to conclude the narrative with a few general observations respecting him as a writer, a clergyman, and a christian.

As a writer, Mr. Fletcher was considerably above mediocrity. The principal defects in his style were, an exuberant diffuseness, and national floridness of expression. In some of his private letters also, there is an occasional quaintness of phraseology, which too often accompanies religious correspondence. Rich, however, in their intrinsic excellence, they will ever be read by truly pious persons with peculiar pleasure, and will perhaps be regarded by them as the most valuable part of his writings.

His Checks to Antinomianism, his Appeal to matter of fact, his political, and in short the whole of his other publications, manifest a degree of elegance, force, and correctness of expression, which would hardly have been expected from a foreigner. His imagination is always lively; his descriptions are animated; his illustrations remarkably happy, and his reasoning acute, clear, and convincing. Had he been a candidate for literary distinction, he had talents to have occupied no inconsiderable rank, either as a humourist, a poet, or an impassioned writer. But the piety which predominated in his mind not only diffused itself through his writings, but directed his attention almost exclusively to subjects of a religious nature.*

As a clergyman, he was never exceeded in zeal, disinterestedness, affection for his flock or anxiety for their spiritual welfare. His heart was in his profession, and he was carried on with an impetus which no opposition or discouragement was able to counteract. He did not consider the work of the ministry as a mere duty; it was his pleasure and delight: and if, in the discharge of this important work, his health and strength declined, and became eventually a sacrifice to the ardour of his feelings, it cannot be regarded as a matter of surprise. The votary of pleasure may be told that his course of life will injure his health, exhaust his finances, and finally ruin him. He will admit the justness of the remark: but he will still persevere; for life would seem to be tolerable without his accustomed pursuits. And such was the persevering ardour of this truly apostolic man: "*Instant in season, and out of season;*" "*always abounding in the work of the Lord.*"

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* Considering Mr. Fletcher as a man of general literature, who in early life had been well acquainted with the poets and dramatic authors of Greece, Rome, and France, his neglect of works of mere genius and imagination, was perhaps more extraordinary than his indifference to family distinctions. One trait on this subject may suffice. Not long before his death, a friend, in the course of conversation, cited a passage from Shakspeare, when Mr. Fletcher said,—"You will think it as strange as it is true, that though I have heard so much in the praise of your immortal Shakspeare, and have often wished to read him, yet to this day I have been so much occupied, that I never could find time to do so."

The principal, the only defect that appeared in his clerical character, was a disregard of some of those prudential regulations and parochial restrictions which are so scrupulously observed by the generality of the clergy of the established church. The fact appears to have been, that the abundant current of his charity, too large for any single channel, flowed in affection towards all; while the ardour of his zeal, ever prompting him to the most extensive usefulness, did not stop to calculate upon those remote consequences which a more accurate attention to the subject might have presented to his mind. "God forbid," said he, "that I should exclude from my brotherly affection, and occasional assistance, any true minister of Christ, because he casts the gospel-net among the Presbyterians, the Independents, the Quakers, or the Baptists. If they will not wish me good luck in the name of the Lord, I will do it to them. They may excommunicate me, if their prejudices prompt them to it. They may build up a wall of partition between themselves and me: but in the strength of my God, whose love is as boundless as his immensity, *I will leap over the wall.*"

As a christian, he shone pre-eminent,

"—————— Velut inter ignes
Luna minores."*

Faith, patience, spirituality, deadness to the world, humility, meekness, purity, and every grace which can adorn the human mind, seemed to have in him their perfect work. "They who saw him only at a distance," observes Mr. Gilpin, "revered him as a man of God; while they who enjoyed a nearer acquaintance with him were held in a state of constant admiration at his attainments in the divine life. He appeared to enjoy an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Every day was with him a day of solemn self-dedication, and every hour an hour of praise or prayer. Naturally formed for pre-eminence, no common degrees of grace were sufficient to satisfy his unbounded desires. He towered above the generality of christians, *earnestly desiring the best gifts,* and anxious to walk in the *most excellent way.* While others are content to taste the living stream, he traced that stream to its source, and lived at the fountain-head of blessedness. To those who were much conversant with him, he appeared as an inhabitant of a better world; so perfectly dead was he to the enjoyments of the present life, and so wholly detached from its anxious cares. Wherever he was called by the providence of God, he was acknowledged as a *burning and shining light. The candle of the Lord* eminently *shone upon his head, and the secret of God was upon his tabernacle. When he went out through the city*, or took his seat in the company of the righteous, he was saluted with unusual reverence, and received as an angel of God. *The young men saw him, and hid themselves; and the aged arose, and stood up.* Even those who were honoured as princes among the people of God, *refrained talking, and laid their hands upon their mouth. When the ear heard him, then it blessed him; and when the eye saw him, it gave witness unto him.* His character was free from those inconsistencies which are too generally observable among the professors of christianity. Whether he sat in the house, or whether he walked by the way; in his hours of retirement, and in his public labours, he was constantly actuated by the same spirit. When he spoke, his conversation was in heaven; and, when he was silent, his very air and countenance bespoke an angelic mind, absorbed in the contemplation of God. In all the changing circumstances of life, he looked and acted like a man whose treasure was laid up in heaven. There his affections were immoveably fixed; and thitherward he was continually tending, with all the power of his soul. He spoke of heaven as the subject of his constant meditation; and looked to it, as travellers to their appointed home. He was an instrument always in tune; and none can tell, but those who have heard, how sweetly it would answer to the touch of Him who strung it. He was an instrument of uncommon compass, and wondrously adapted to every occasion. Every breath that swept over the chords of this living lyre drew from it some according sound:—if from man, it produced strains of affection and sympathy;—if from God, it called forth higher sounds of gratitude and devotion."

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* Like the moon among the lesser stars.—*Horace.*

To the above testimony is subjoined the following from the Rev. John Venn, late vicar of Huddersfield and Yelling; and it derives additional importance from the consideration that that excellent man maintained some of those controverted tenets which Mr. Fletcher deemed it his duty to oppose. "Fletcher," says he, "was a luminary;—a luminary did I say?—he was a sun. I have known all the great men for these fifty years: but I have known none like him. I was intimately acquainted with him, and was once under the same roof with him for six weeks together; during which time I never heard him say a single word which was not proper to be spoken, and which had not a tendency to minister grace to the hearers."

LETTERS

OF THE

REV. J. W. FLETCHER,

FROM HIS POSTHUMOUS WORKS,

EDITED BY

THE REV. MELVILLE HORNE.

LETTERS.

Tern, *November 24th*, 1756.

THE REV. MR. JOHN WESLEY.

Reverend Sir,

As I look upon you as my spiritual guide, and cannot doubt of your patience to hear, and your experience to answer a question, proposed by one of your people, I freely lay my case before you.

Since the first time I began to feel the love of God shed abroad in my soul, which was, I think, at seven years of age, I resolved to give myself up to him, and to the service of his church, if ever I was fit for it; but the corruption which is in the world, and that which was in my heart, soon weakened, if not erased, those first characters, which grace had written upon it. However, I went through my studies, with a design of going into orders; but afterwards, upon serious reflection, feeling I was unequal to so great a burden, and disgusted by the necessity I should be under to subscribe to the doctrine of predestination, I yielded to the desire of my friends, who would have me to go into the army; but just before I was quite engaged in a military employment, I met with such disappointments as occasioned my coming to England. Here I was called outwardly three times to go into orders; but upon praying to God, that if those calls were not from him, they might come to nothing, something always blasted the designs of my friends; and in this, I have often admired the goodness of God, who prevented my rushing into that important employment, as the horse into the battle. I never was more thankful for this favour, than since I heard the gospel in its purity. Before I had been afraid, but then I trembled to meddle with holy things; and resolved to work out my salvation privately, without engaging in a way of life, which required so much more grace and gifts than I was conscious I possessed; yet, from time to time, I felt warm and strong desires to cast myself and my inability on the Lord, if I should be called any more, knowing that he could help me, and show his strength in my weakness: and these desires were increased by some little success, which attended my exhortations and letters to my friends.

I think it necessary to let you know, Sir, that my patron often desired me to take orders, and said, he would soon help me to a living; to which I coldly answered, I was not fit, and that, besides, I did not know how to get a title. The thing was in that state when about six weeks ago, a gentleman, I hardly knew, offered me a living, which, in all probability, will be vacant soon; and a clergyman, I never spoke to, gave me, of his own accord, the title of curate to one of his livings. Now, Sir, the question which I beg you to decide is, whether I must and can make use of that title to get into orders? For, with respect to the living, were it vacant, I have no mind to it; because, I think, I could preach with more fruit in my native country, and in my own tongue.

I am in suspense: on one side my heart tells me I must try, and it tells me so whenever I feel any degree of the love of God and man: on the other, when I examine, whether I am fit for it, I so plainly see my want of gifts, and especially of that soul of all the labours of a minister, love, continual, universal, flaming love, that my confidence disappears; I accuse myself of pride to dare to entertain the desire of supporting one day the ark of God, and conclude that an extraordinary punishment will, sooner or later, overtake my rashness. As I am in both of these frames successively, I must own, Sir, I do not see which of these two ways before me, I can take with safety; and I shall gladly be ruled by you; because, I trust, God will direct you in giving me the advice, you think will best conduce to his glory, which is the only thing I would have in view in this affair. I know how precious your time is, and desire no long answer,—persist or forbear will satisfy and influence, reverend Sir, your unworthy servant,

I. F.

LONDON, *Nov.* 15*th*, 1759.

THE REV. MR. CHARLES WESLEY.

MY DEAR SIR,

Your letter was not put into my hand till eight days after my arrival in London. I carried the enclosed agreeably to its address, and passed three hours with a modern prodigy—an humble and pious Countess. I went with trembling, and in obedience to your orders; but I soon perceived a little of what the disciples felt, when Christ said to them, "It is I, be not afraid." She proposed to me something of what you hinted me in your garden: namely, to celebrate the communion sometimes at her house of a morning, and to preach when occasion offered; in such a manner, however, as not to restrain my liberty, nor to prevent my assisting you, or preaching to the French Refugees; and that only till Providence should clearly point out the path in which I should go. Charity, politeness, and reason, accompanied her offer; and I confess, in spite of the resolution which I had almost absolutely formed, to fly the houses of the great, without even the exception of the Countess's, I found myself so greatly changed, that I should have accepted on the spot, a proposal which I should have declined from any other mouth; but my engagement with you withheld me; and thanking the Countess, I told her, when I had reflected on her obliging offer I would do myself the honour of waiting upon her again.

Nevertheless, two difficulties stand in my way. Will it be consistent with that poverty of spirit which I seek? Can I accept an office for which I have such small talents; and shall I not dishonour the cause of God by stammering out the mysteries of the gospel in a place where the most approved ministers of the Lord have preached with so much power, and so much success? I suspect that my own vanity gives more weight to this second objection than it deserves to have: what think you?

I give myself up to your judicious counsels; you take unnecessary pains to assure me that they are disinterested, for I cannot doubt it. I feel myself unworthy of them; much more still of appellation of friend, with which you honour me. You are an indulgent father to me, and the name of son suits me better than that of brother.

You ask "whether I can, with confidence, give you up to the mercy of God?" Yes, I can, and I feel that for you which I do not for myself; I am so assured of your salvation, that I ask no other place in heaven than that I may have at your feet. I doubt even if paradise would be a paradise to me, unless it were shared with you; and the single idea which your question excited, that we might one day be separated, pierced my heart, and bathed my eyes with tears. They were sweet tears which seemed to water and confirm my hope, or rather the certainty I have, that He who hath begun a good work in us, will also finish it, and unite me to you in Christ, by the bonds of an everlasting love: and not only to you, but to your children and your wife, whom I salute in Christ. Adieu. I am, &c. I. F.

MADELEY, *Nov.* 22, 1762.

THE REV. MR. CHARLES WESLEY.

MY DEAR SIR,

The debates about the illegality of exhorting in houses (although only in my own parish) grew, some time ago, to such a height, that I was obliged to lay my reasons before the bishop; but his Lordship very prudently sends me no answer. I think he knows not how to disapprove, and yet dares not approve, this methodistical way of procedure.

Brother Ley arrived safe here yesterday, and confirms the melancholy news of many of our brethren overshooting sober and steady christianity in London. I feel a great deal for you and the church in these critical circumstances. O that I could stand in the gap! O that I could, by sacrificing myself, shut this immense abyss of enthusiasm which opens its mouth among us!

The corruption of the best things is always the worst of corruptions. Going into an extreme of this nature, or only winking at it, will give an eternal sanction to the vile aspersions cast, on all sides, on the purest doctrines of christianity; and we shall sadly overthrow—overthrow, in the worst manner, what we have endeavoured to build for many years.

The nearer the parts that mortify are to the heart, the more speedily is an amputation to be resolved upon.

You will say, perhaps, "But what if the heart itself is attacked?" Then let the heart be plucked out as well as the right eye. Was not Abraham's heart bound up in the life of Isaac? Yet he believed that if he offered him up, God was able to restore him, even from the dead; and was not God better to him than his hopes?

I have a particular regard for M—— and B——; both of them are my correspondents: I am strongly prejudiced in favour of the witnesses, and do not willingly receive what is said against them; but allowing that what is reported is one half mere exaggeration, the tenth part of the rest shows that spiritual pride, presumption, arrogance, stubbornness, party spirit, uncharitableness, prophetic mistakes—in short, that every sinew of enthusiasm is now at work in many of that body. I do not credit any one's bare word, but I ground my sentiments on B——'s own letters.

May I presume, unasked, to lay before you my mite of observation. If I had it in my power to overlook the matter, as you have, would it be wrong in me calmly to sit down with some unprejudiced friends, and lovers of both parties, and fix with them the marks and symptoms of enthusiasm; then insist, at first in love, and afterwards, if necessary, with all the weight of my authority, upon those who have them, or plead for them, either to stand to the sober rule of christianity, or openly to depart from us?

Fear not, dear sir, the Lord will take care of the ark; and though hundreds of Uzziahs should fall off, most of them would return with Noah's dove. Have faith in the word, and leave the rest to Providence.—"The Lord will provide," is a comfortable motto for a believer. I am, with most hearty prayers, that God would fill you, more than ever, with wisdom, steadiness, meekness, and fortitude, Rev. and dear sir, &c.

I. F.

MADELEY, *March 5th*, 1764.

MISS HATTON.

You seem, Madam, not to have a clear idea of the happiness of the love of Jesus, or, at least, of your privilege of loving him again. Your dullness in private prayer arises from the want of familiar friendship with Jesus. To obviate it, go to your closet as if you were going to meet the dearest friend you ever had; cast yourself immediately at his feet, bemoan your coldness before him, extol his love to you, and let your heart break with a desire to love him, till it actually melts with his love. Be you, if not the importunate widow, at least the importunate virgin, and get your Lord to avenge you of your adversary—I mean your cold heart.

You ask me some directions to get a mortified spirit: in order to get it, get Recollection.

Recollection is a dwelling within ourselves; a being abstracted from the creature, and turned towards God.

Recollection is both outward and inward. Outward recollection consists in silence from all idle and superfluous words; and in solitude or a wise disentanglement from the world, keeping to our own business, observing and following the order of God for ourselves, and shutting the ear against all curious and unprofitable matters. Inward recollection consists in shutting the door of the senses in a deep attention to the presence of God, and in a continual care of entertaining holy thoughts, for fear of spiritual idleness.

Through the power of the Spirit, let this recollection be steady even in the midst of hurrying business; let it be calm and peaceable; and let it be lasting, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

To maintain this recollection, beware of engaging too deeply, and beyond what is necessary, in outward things: beware of suffering your affections to be entangled by worldly desires, your imagination to amuse itself with unprofitable objects, and indulging yourself in commission of what are called small faults.

For want of continuing in a recollected frame all the day, our times of prayer are frequently dry and useless, imagination prevails, and the heart wanders; whereas we pass easily from recollection to delightful prayer. Without this spirit, there can be no useful self-denial; nor can we know ourselves; but where it dwells, it makes the soul all eye, all ear; traces and discovers sin, repels its first assaults, or crushes it in its earliest risings.

In recollection let your mind act according to the drawings of grace, and it will probably lead you, either to contemplate Jesus as crucified, and interceding for you, &c. or to watch your senses and suppress your passions, to keep before God in respectful silence of heart, and to watch and follow the motions of grace, and feed on the promises.

But take care here to be more taken up with the thoughts of God than of yourself; and consider how hardly recollection is sometimes obtained, and how easily it is lost. Use no forced labour to raise a particular frame; nor tire, fret, and grow impatient, if you have no comfort; but meekly acquiesce and confess yourself unworthy of it; lie prostrate in humble submission before God, and patiently wait for the smiles of Jesus.

May the following motives stir you up to the pursuit of recollection: 1st. We must forsake all and die to all first by recollection. 2d. Without it God's voice can't be heard in the soul. 3d. It is the altar on which we must offer up our Isaacs. 4th. It is instrumentally a ladder (if I may be allowed the expression) to ascend into God. 5th. By it the soul gets to its centre, out of which it cannot rest. 6th. Man's soul is the temple of God—recollection the holy of holies.—7th. As the wicked, by recollection, find hell in their hearts, so faithful souls find heaven. 8th. Without recollection all means of grace are useless, or make but a light and transitory impression.

If we would be recollected, we must expect to suffer. Sometimes God does not speak immediately to the heart; we must, then, continue to listen with a more humble silence. Sometimes assaults of the heart or of the temper may follow, together with weariness, and a desire to turn the mind to something else: here we must be patient—by patience unwearied we inherit the promises.

Dissipated souls are severely punished. If any man abide not in Christ, he is cast out as a branch—cast out of the light of God's countenance into the drudgery of the senses. He dries up, and a barrenness follows in the use of the means. The world and Satan gather and use him for their service. He is cast into the fire of the passions of guilt, of temptation, and, perhaps, of hell.

As dissipation always meets its punishment, so recollection never fails of its reward. After patient waiting comes communion with God, and the sweet sense of his peace and love. Recollection is a castle, an inviolable fortress against the world and the devil: it renders all times and places alike, and is the habitation where Christ and his Bride dwell.

I give you these hints, not to set Christ aside, but that you may, according to the light and power given to you, take those stones and place them upon the chief corner-stone, and cement them with the blood of Jesus, until the superstructure, in some measure, answers to the excellence of the foundation. I beg an interest in your prayers, for myself, and those committed to my charge, and am, with sincerity, madam, your servant for Christ's sake, I. F.

MADELEY, *September* 3, 1764.

MISS HATTON.

MADAM,

I think the state your soul is in is not uncommon. The only advice I can at present give, is not to look to self, except it be to believe it away. Be generously determined not to live easy, without the thought of Jesus on your mind, and his love, or at least endeavours after it, in your heart. Then get that love, or the increase of it, by obstinately believing the love of Christ to you, till you are ashamed into some return of it. A passage I have found much relief from, when my soul hath been in the state you describe, is, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" This reckoning by faith, I find, is not reckoning without one's host; but Christ is always ready to set his hand to the bill which faith draws.

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* Rom. vi. 11.

With respect to the hindrances your worldly business lays in the way of your soul, I would have you persuaded that they are by no means insurmountable. The following means, in due subordination to faith in Jesus, may, by the blessing of God, be of service to you.

1st. Get up early, and save time before you go to business, to put on the whole armour of God, by close meditation and earnest prayer.

2d. Consider the temptation that most easily besets you, whether it be hurry, or vanity, or lightness, or want of recollection to do what you do as unto God. Ponder the consequences of those sins, see your weakness to resist them, and get at any rate a more feeling sense of your helplessness; when you have it, you will naturally watch unto prayer, and look to Christ for strength from moment to moment.

3d. When your mind hath been drawn aside, do not fret, or let yourself go down the stream of nature, as if it was in vain to attempt to swim against it; but confess your fault, and calmly resume your former endeavour, but with more humility and watchfulness.

4th. Steal from business now and then, though for two or three minutes only, and in the corner where you can be least observed, pour out your soul in confession, or a short ejaculation at the feet of Jesus, for power to watch, and to believe that he can keep you watching. May you feelingly believe that he hath bought the power for you, and then of a truth you will find it done to you according to your faith.

As to your correspondent's letter, I approve its contents, but would have no one depend on my judgment, especially on the points it treats of, as I have been thought, sometimes, to consider them, with a mind prepossessed in their behalf. This I know, that all cannot, ought not to receive some of the sayings that letter contains; and yet happier far, in my opinion, are those that can and do receive them. Let every one follow grace and Providence, and we shall be guided aright. I am, &c. I. F.

MADELEY, *December* ——, 1764.

MISS HATTON.

MADAM,

I am sensible how much I want advice in a thousand particulars, and how incapable I am safely to direct any one: and I shall, nevertheless, venture to throw upon this sheet the following observations, as they come to my mind on reading your letter.

You cannot expect, on the gospel plan, to attain to such a carriage as will please all you converse with. The Son of God, the original of all human perfection, was blamed sometimes for his silence, and sometimes for his speaking, &c. and shall the handmaid be above her Master?

There is no sin in wearing such things as you have by you, if they are not out of character; I mean, if they are necessary for your station, and characterize your rank.

There is no sin in allowing yourself a little more latitude of speech, provided you listen to Christ by inward attention to his teaching, and the end of what you say may be to introduce what is useful and edifying; for God judgeth of words according to the intention of the speaker. I may speak idly even in the pulpit; and I may speak to edification in the market, if what I say is either necessary or proper to introduce, or drive the nail of a profitable truth. Some parables of our Lord would have been deemed idle talk had it not have been for the end he pursued, and, upon the whole, accomplished by them. No particular rule can be given here; a thousand circumstances of persons, tempers, places, times, states, &c. will necessarily vary a christian's plan.

There is no sin in looking cheerful: No, it is our duty to be cheerful—Rejoice evermore; and if it is our duty always to be filled with joy, it is our duty to appear what we are in reality. I hope, however, your friends know how to distinguish between cheerfulness and levity.

If you want to recommend religion to those you converse with, and, in many instances, to pluck up offence by the root, let your heart lie where Mary's body did. Keep close to Jesus, be attentive to his still, small voice, and he will fill you with humble love, and such love will teach you, without any rule, as by the instinct of your new nature, "to become all things to all men."

You ask what the apostle meant by that expression: it is certain he did not mean to overset his own precept, "Be not conformed to the world." I apprehend that, in every case, wherein we might promote the spiritual or temporal good of any one, by doing or suffering things of an indifferent nature, or even painful and disagreeable to us, we ought to be ready to become all things to all; provided the good we propose is superior to the inconveniences to which we submit. Here, also, we stand in need of humble love, and meek wisdom, that we may so weigh circumstances as to form a right judgment in all things.

I am glad the Lord strips you: I wish self may never clothe you again. Beware of stiff singularity in things barely indifferent: it is self in disguise; and it is so much the more dangerous, as it comes recommended by a serious, self-denying, religious appearance.

I hope the short comings of some about you will not prevent your eyeing the prize of a glorious conformity to our blessed Head. It is to be feared that not a few of those who talk of having attained it, have mistaken the way; they are still something, and I apprehend an important step towards that conformity, is to become nothing; or, rather, to be with St. Paul, to become in our own eyes the chief of sinners, and the least of saints.

Mr. Harris seems to me one among ten thousand; he has left a particular blessing behind him in this place. The God of peace give us all the blessings that the Messenger and the Mediator of the New Covenant brought with him, at this time, into the world! May we so receive him, that by a blessed exchange, as he is clad with our flesh, so we may put on him, and be covered with his righteousness and filled with his Spirit! Salute the church in your house from your servant in the gospel. I. F.

MADELEY, *January* 31*st*, 1765.

MISS HATTON.

MADAM,

"You strive, pray, resist, but are little the better;" yet pray, strive, and resist on. It is good to be tried, and to get a blessing in the very fire: we shall then know how to value it properly. But let me be free with you, madam; do you pray, resist, and strive against wanderings with any steadiness, and do you do it in cheerful hope to overcome through the blood of the Lamb? When you have been unhinged from Christ in mind or heart, do you with stronger indignation against wanderings, a calmer expectation of the assistance of the Spirit, and a deeper agony of faith, seek to be avenged of your adversary? Do you imitate the importunate widow? If this be the case, you will not complain long; for whatsoever we thus ask in the name of Christ, we shall surely receive. And should the Lord, for reasons best known to himself, try your faith and hope, yet that longer trial will be found to praise and honour in the end. Only faint not; and when you find yourself inclined to do so, in all haste fly to the cordial of the promises, and determine to take nothing else till your heart is revived and made strong again.

The same power of God, through praying faith, is necessary to keep you from reasoning unprofitably.—Whenever this arises to any height, there is one thing wanting, a steadily exerted will, never thus to reason. We cannot be so easily betrayed, or slide away into this snare of the devil so easily as into the other. I apprehend, that whosoever abides steadily purposed not to reason, shall not do it. The will starts aside first, the resolution of course followeth, and the tempter easily takes their place. Get willing, truly willing, under the cross, and keep there to keep your will, or you will beat the air.

Last Sunday I preached two sermons upon Heb. ii. and 1. I see so much in that faith of the apostle, that I can hardly pray for any thing besides that "evidence of things not seen, that substance of things hoped for." To how many mistakes and fatal errors have we opened the door, by varying from the apostle, and pretending to be wiser than the Holy Ghost! The Lord fill you and yours with that faith. Farewell. I. F.

MADELEY, *Jan.* 13, 1766.

MISS HATTON.

MADAM,

I am almost ashamed of answering your letters after my long delays, but better late than never, as I hope your indulgence will put the best construction on what time does not allow me to make an apology for.

I do not wonder if ***** &c. hath been a snare to entangle your thoughts; but it is now over; and what is that to thee? follow thou Christ. You may, however, learn this lesson, that the minding Christ and our own souls, with Mary, while we leave the world to Martha, is no easy thing in a day of temptation; and that no one knows what he is till he is tried, and tried in the tenderest points—love, liberty, esteem, and sharp bodily pain. Lord prepare us for such trials, and may we encounter them in the whole armour of God!

This evening I have buried one of the warmest opposers of my ministry, a stout, strong young man, aged twenty-four years. About three months ago he came to the church-yard with a corpse, but refused to come into the church. When the burial was over, I went to him, and mildly expostulated with him. His constant answer was, "that he had bound himself never to come to church while I was there; adding, that he would take the consequences," &c. Seeing I got nothing, I left him, saying with uncommon warmth, (though, as far as I can remember, without the least touch of resentment,) "I am clear of your blood; henceforth it is upon your own head; if you will not come to church upon your own legs, prepare to come upon your neighbours' shoulders." He wasted from that time, and, to my great surprise, hath been buried on the spot where we were when the conversation passed between us. When I visited him in his sickness, he seemed tame as a wolf in a trap. O may God have turned him into a sheep in his last hours!

This last year is the worst I have had here—barren in convictions, fruitful in backslidings. May this prove for us, and for you, the acceptable year of the Lord. I beg your prayers on this behalf.

I have filled my page, but not with Jesus' name: let your heart contain what my letter wants—Jesus and his precious blood—Jesus, and his free, glorious salvation. Live to him, breathe for him; buy, sell, eat, drink, read, write for him; receive him as yours altogether, and give him your whole self, with all that is around you. Take us all, Lord, into thy gracious favour, stamp us with thy glorious image, and conduct us to thy eternal kingdom!

Present my christian respects to Mrs. Hatton, your sister, and all your friends, and accept the same from your unworthy brother, I. F.

Madeley, *July* 28*th*, 1766.

MISS HATTON.

My Dear Friend,

I hear still a very indifferent account of your health. I stand in doubt as to your bodily life; but it is in the hand of Jesus, and Jesus is wise, Jesus is good, Jesus is Almighty: he will, therefore, dispose of you for the best. While you see the scales hovering, and it may be that of life slowly descending towards a quiet grave, calmly look at Jesus; and when the feebleness of your spirits prevents you from crying out, in extatic love, "My Lord and my God!" let your devoted, resigned, patient heart still whisper, "Thy will be done!"

Your last letter raised my hopes of your recovery. Mr. Perry, who saw you since, damps them again: but, whether we live, we live to the Lord, or whether we die, we die to the Lord. Not for the works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saveth us: glory be to God for his unspeakable gift! Jesus remembers you in his all-prevailing intercession—and, I might add, I do in my prayers, if the weight of a dancing mote deserved to be mentioned after that of an immense mountain. I am, with Christian respects to our kind, loving friends at Wem, your poor Madeley friend, I. F.

Madeley, *July* 30*th,* 1766.

MISS HATTON.

My Dear Friend,

So you are likely to be at rest first? Well, the Lord's will be done! I should be glad to have you stay to help us to the kingdom of God; but if God wants to take you there, and house you before a storm, I shall only cry, "One of the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," and try to make the best of my way after you.

A calm receiving of the gospel tidings, upon a conviction of your lost estate, with suitable tempers, is a sign that you are in a safe state; but I want you altogether in a comfortable one. Your business, I apprehend, is not to turn the dunghill of nature, but to suck the gospel milk. Dwell much, if not altogether, upon free justification, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. View the sufficiency, fulness, suitableness, freeness of his atonement and righteousness; and hide yourself without delay under both. Look at death only as a door to let you out of many infirmities and pains, into the arms of Jesus, your heavenly bridegroom. Stir up faith, hope, and love; that is trimming your lamp. Since last Monday, I find the burden of your soul upon mine in a very particular manner, and I hope that I shall not cease to pray for you, that you may go not only calmly, but joyfully, the way of all flesh. I have got some praying souls to share with me in that profitable work, and I hope you will meet our spirits at the throne of grace as we do yours.

Let me have the comfort of thinking that you are with your physician, husband, and all; who will order all things for the best. Pray hard, believe harder, and love hardest. Let the cry of your soul be, "None but Jesus living, none but Jesus dying." Let Christ be your life, and then death, whether it comes sooner or later, will be your gain.

Mr. Glazebrook waits for these lines, and I conclude by again entreating you to believe. "Only believe," said Jesus to the Ruler—and faith will work by love, and love by a desire to depart and to be with Christ. God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, bless, uphold, and comfort you! Farewell, and forget not to pray for your helpless friend, I. F.

MADELEY, *September* ——, 1766.

MISS HATTON.

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,

God wonderfully supports your tottering clay, that he may fill up what is lacking in your faith. Concur with the merciful design: arise in spirit, shake off the dust of earthly thoughts, put on your glorious apparel—put on, every moment, the Lord Jesus Christ.—Dare to believe—on Christ lay hold; wrestle with Christ in mighty, or even in feeble prayer. He breaks not the bruised reed; let the reed be grafted by simple faith, in the true vine, in the tree of life, and it will bring forth glorious fruit; not only resignation, but power to welcome the King, disarmed of his terrors, and turned into a messenger of joy, and a guide, under Christ, to heavenly happiness. Let not one feeble breath pass without carrying an act of desire, or of faith towards Christ. Bestir yourself to lay hold on God, and when you find an absolute want of power, be you the more careful to lie at the feet of Him who hath all power given him on earth and heaven for you. Farewell, my dear friend that is, be found in Christ, for there only can we fare well, whether we live or die.

I. F.

MADELEY, *Jan.* 30*th*, 1767.

MRS. HATTON.

DEAR MADAM,

I heard last night the news of Miss Hatton's death. As the stroke had long threatened you, and as she had, through mercy, long ago resigned herself to it, I hope it hath not found you without the shield of resignation, patience, and confidence in God. A sparrow, you know, falls not to the ground without his permission, much less can a member of his Son fall into the grave without his direction. Surely his wisdom is infallible: he hath chosen the better part both for you and your daughter; he hath chosen to take her out of her misery, to translate her to the place where the weary are at rest, and to give you, by removing her, an opportunity of caring for your soul, as you cared for her body.

Now, what have you to do, Madam, but to put your hand upon your mouth and say, "It is the Lord; he gave and he hath taken away; blessed be his holy name!" If you sorrow, let it be in hope of meeting her soon, all glorious within and without, whom you lately saw such a spectacle of mortality. David observed, in the lesson for this morning, that the love of Jonathan had been better to him than the love of women. O dwell much upon the consideration of the love of Jesus, and you will find that it far surpasses that of the most dutiful children: and comfort youself by the believing thought, that Jesus lives, lives for you, and that your daughter lives in him; where you will soon have the joy to meet her as an incarnate angel.

I am, with prayers for you and Miss Fanny, to whom I wish much consolation in her elder, never-dying brother, Dear Madam, your unworthy, obliged servant in Christ, I. F.

MADELEY, *Feb.* ——, 1767.

JAMES IRELAND, ESQ.

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,

The Lord will spare your daughter as long as she can get good, and do you and others good by the sight of her sufferings, when that cup is drunk up, she will be willing to go, and you to let her go. Remember, she is the Lord's much more than yours; and that what we call dying is only breaking the shell of a troublesome body, that Christ may fully come at the kernel of the soul, which he has bought.

Poor Miss Hatton died last Sunday fortnight, full of serenity, faith, and love. The four last hours of her life were better than all her sickness. When the pangs of death were upon her, the comforts of the Almighty bore her triumphantly through, and some of her last words were—"Grieve not at my happiness—this world is no more to me than a bit of burnt paper—Grace! Grace! A sinner saved! I wish I could tell you half of what I feel and see—I am going to keep an everlasting Sabbath—O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through my Lord Jesus Christ." It is very remarkable, that she had hardly any joy in her illness: but God made her ample amends in her extremity. He kept the strongest cordial for the time of need: he does all things well: blessed, for ever blessed, be his holy name!

Worcestershire also lately lost a wise virgin of a truth, dear Miss Fragena, Mr. Biddulph's sister. The morning before she expired, she said, "I have had a stronger conflict last night, than ever I had in all my life; it was sharp and terrible; but Jesus hath overcome, and he will also overcome for you and me: be of good courage, believe, hope, love, and obey."

I wish you had often such meetings as that you mention: every one should have as many thrusts at that crooked serpent, that holy Devil, Bigotry, as he can. If I can leave my parish, I belive it will be to accompany Lady Huntingdon to the Goshen of our land,—Yorkshire—to learn the love of Christ at the feet of my brethren and fathers there. I am obliged to you for the present you mention: I have taken again to the drink of my country water, which agrees well with me, and I shall not want it for myself: if it is not sent, diminish or stop it according to this notice. Farewell in the Lord Jesus.

I. F.

OAKHALL, *September* 23, 1766.

TO THOSE WHO LOVE OR FEAR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AT MADELEY: GRACE, PEACE, AND LOVE BE MULTIPLIED TO YOU, FROM OUR GOD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

Providence, my dear brethren, called me so suddenly from you, that I had not time to take my leave and recommend myself to your prayers: but I hope the good Spirit of our God, which is the Spirit of love and supplication, has brought me to your remembrance, as the poorest and weakest of Christ's ministers, and, consequently, as him whose hands stand most in need of being strengthened and lifted up by your prayers. Pray on, then, for yourselves, for one another, and for him whose glory is to minister to you in holy things, and whose sorrow it is not to do it in a manner more suitable to the majesty of the gospel, and more profitable to your souls.

My heart is with you: nevertheless, I bear patiently this bodily separation for three reasons. First, the variety of more faithful and able ministers whom you have, during my absence, is more likely to be serviceable to you, than my presence among you ; and I would always prefer your profit to my satisfaction. Secondly, I hope Providence will give me those opportunities of conversing and praying with a greater variety of experienced christians, which will tend to my own improvement, and I trust, in the end, to yours. Thirdly, I flatter myself, that after some weeks' absence, my ministry will be recommended by the advantage of novelty, which (the more the pity,) goes farther with some than the word itself. In the meantime I shall give you some advice, which, it may be, will prove both suitable and profitable to you.

1st. Endeavour to improve daily under the ministry which Providence blesses you with. Be careful to attend it with diligence, faith and prayer. Would it not be a great shame, if, when ministers come thirty or forty miles to offer you peace and pardon, strength and comfort, in the name of God, any of you should slight the glorious message, or hear it as if it was nothing to you, and as if you heard it not ? See, then, that you never come from a sermon, without being more deeply convinced of sin and righteousness.

2d. Use more prayer before you go to church. Consider that your next appearance there may be in a coffin; and entreat the Lord to give you now, so to hunger and thirst after righteousness, that you may be filled. Hungry people never go fasting from a feast. Call to mind the text I preached from the last Sunday but one before I left you, "Wherefore laying aside all guile," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 12.)

3d. When you are under the word, beware of sitting as judges, and not as criminals. Many judge of the manner, matter, voice, and person of the preacher. You, perhaps, judge all the congregation, when you should judge yourselves, worthy of eternal death; and yet, worthy of eternal life, through the worthiness of Him, who stood and was condemned at Pilate's bar for you. The moment you have done crying to God, as guilty, or thanking Christ as reprieved criminals, you have reason to conclude, this advice is levelled at you.

4th. When you have used a mean of grace, and do not find yourselves sensibly quickened, let it be a matter of deep humiliation to you. For want of repenting of their unbelief and hardness of heart, some get into a habit of deadness and indolence; so that they come to be as insensible, and as little ashamed of themselves for it, as stones.

5th. Beware of the inconsistent behaviour of those who complain they are full of wanderings in the evening under the word, when they have suffered their minds to wander from Christ all the day long. O! get acquainted with him, that you may walk in him, and with him. Whatsoever you do or say, especially in the things of God, do or say it, as if Christ was before, behind, and on every side of you. Indeed he is so, whether you consider it or not; for if, when he visibly appeared on earth, he called himself the Son of Man, who is in heaven, how much more, then, is he present on earth now, that he makes his immediate appearance in heaven? Make your consciences, then, to maintain a sense of his blessed presence all the day long, and all the day long you will have a continual feast; for can you conceive any thing more delightful than to be always at the fountain of love, beauty, and joy;—at the spring of power, wisdom, goodness, and truth? Can there be a purer and more melting happiness, than to be with the best of fathers, the kindest of brothers, the most generous of benefactors, and the tenderest of husbands? Now Jesus is all this, and much more to the believing soul. Oh! believe, my friends, in Jesus now, through a continual now; and until you can thus believe, mourn over your unbelieving hearts; drag them to him, as you can; think of the efficacy of his blood, shed for the ungodly, and wait for the Spirit of faith from on high.

6th. Some of you wonder why you cannot believe; why you cannot see Jesus with the eye of your mind, and delight in him with all the affections of your heart. I apprehend the reason to be one of these, or, perhaps all of them.

First, you are not poor, lost, undone, helpless sinners in yourselves. You indulge spiritual and refined self-righteousness, you are not yet dead to the law, and quite slain by the commandment. Now the kingdom of heaven belongs to none but the poor in spirit. Jesus came to save none but the lost. What wonder, then, if Jesus is nothing to you, and if you do not live in his kingdom of peace, righteousness, and joy in the Holy Ghost?

Secondly. Perhaps you spend your time in curious reasonings, instead of casting yourselves, as forlorn sinners, at Christ's feet; leaving it to him to bless you, when, and in the manner and degree he pleases. Know that he is the wise and sovereign God, and that it is your duty to lie before him as clay; as fools; as sinful nothings.

Thirdly. Perhaps some of you wilfully keep idols of one kind or other; you indulge some sin against light and knowledge, and it is neither matter of humiliation nor confession to you. The love of praise, of the world, of money, and sensual gratifications, when not lamented, are as implacable enemies to Christ as Judas and Herod. "How can you believe, seeing you seek the honour that cometh of men?" Hew then your Agags in pieces before the Lord; run from your Delilahs to Jesus; cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye that offends you. "Come out from among them, and be separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you." Nevertheless, when you strive, take care not to make yourselves a righteousness of your striving. Remember that meritorious, justifying righteousness, is finished and brought in, and that your works can no more add to it, than your sins can diminish from it. Shout, then, "The Lord our Righteousness;" and if you feel yourselves undone sinners, humbly, yet boldly say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength."

When I was in London I endeavoured to make the most of my time: that is to say, to hear, receive and practise the word. Accordingly, I went to Mr. Whitfield's tabernacle, and heard him give his society a most excellent exhortation upon love. He began by observing, "that when the Apostle St. John was old, and past walking and preaching, he would not forsake the assembling himself with the brethren, as the manner of too many is, upon little or no pretence at all. On the contrary, he got himself carried to their meeting, and with his last thread of voice, preached to them his final sermon, consisting of this one sentence, My little children, love one another." I wish, I pray, I earnestly beseech you, to follow that evangelical, apostolical advice; and, till God make you all little children, little in your own eyes, and simple as little children, give me leave to say, my dear brethren, love one another, and, of course, judge not, provoke not, and be not shy one of another; but bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Yea, bear with one another's infirmities, and do not easily cast off any one; no, not for sin, except it is obstinately persisted in.

My sheet is full, and so is my heart, of good wishes for you, and ardent longings after you all. When I return, let me have the comfort of finding you all believing and loving. Farewell, my dear brethren.—The blessing of God be with you all! This is the earnest desire of your unworthy minister, I. F.

Madeley, *July* 30*th*, 1768.

JAMES IRELAND, ESQ.

My Dear Friend,

Uncertain as I am whether your daughter is yet alive, or whether the Lord hath called her from this vale of darkness and tears, I know not what to say to you on the subject, but this, that our heavenly Father appoints all things for the best. If her days of suffering are prolonged, it is to honour her with a conformity to the crucified Jesus; if they are shortened, she will have drunk all her cup of affliction; and, I flatter myself, that she has found, at the bottom of it, not the bitterness and the gaul of her sins, but the honey and wine of our divine Saviour's righteousness, and the consolations of his Spirit.

I had lately some views of death, and it appeared to me in the most brilliant colours. What is it to die, but to open our eyes after the disagreeable dream of this life, after the black sleep in which we are buried on this earth? It is to break the prison of corruptible flesh and blood into which sin hath cast us; to draw aside the curtain, to cast off the material veil, which prevents us from seeing the Supreme beauty and goodness face to face. It is to quit our polluted and tattered raiment, to be invested with robes of honour and glory; and to behold the Sun of Righteousness in brightness, without an interposing cloud. O my dear friend, how lovely is death, when we look at it in Jesus Christ! To die is one of the greatest privileges of the christian.

If Miss Ireland is still living, tell her a thousand times, that Jesus is the resurrection and the life; that he hath vanquished and disarmed death; that he hath brought life and immortality to light, and that all things are ours, whether life or death, eternity or time.—These are those great truths upon which she ought to risk, or rather, to repose her soul with full assurance. Every thing is a shadow and a lie, in comparison of the reality of the gospel. If your daughter be dead, believe in Jesus, and you shall find her again in him, who fills all in all, who encircles the material and spiritual world in his arms—in the immense bosom of his divinity.

I have not time to write to Mrs. Ireland; but I entreat her to keep her promise, and to inform me what victories she has gained over the world, the flesh, and sin. Surely when a daughter is dead or dying, it is high time for a father and a mother to die to all things below, and aspire, in good earnest, to that eternal life which God has given us in Jesus Christ. Adieu, my dear friend. Yours, I. F.

MADELEY, *March* 27, 1774.

JAMES IRELAND, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR,

I think I wrote my last two days before I received your bounty—a large hogshead of rice and two cheeses. Accept the thanks of our poor and mine on the occasion. I distributed it on Shrove Tuesday, and preached to a numerous congregation, on "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you." May you and I find the bread we scattered that day, though it should not be till after many days. We prayed for our benefactor, that God would give him an hundred fold in this life, and eternal life where life eternal will be no burden. I saw then what I have not often seen on such occasions, gladness, without the appearance of envying or grudging.

How kind is my lady to offer to interpose, and to wipe off the aspersions of my London accusers. I had before sent my reply, which was only a plain narrative of two facts, upon which, it appeared to me, the capital charges were founded, together with some gentle expostulations, which I hope have had the desired effect.—Give my duty to the dear elect lady, and thank her a thousand times for this new addition to all her former favours, till I have an opportunity of doing it in person.

I get very slowly out of the mire of my controversy, and yet I hope to get over it, if God spares my life, in two or three pieces more. Since I wrote last, I have added to my Equal Check, a piece which I call "An Essay on Truth, or a Rational Vindication of the Doctrine of Salvation by Faith," which I have taken the liberty to dedicate to Lady Huntingdon, to have an opportunity of clearing her ladyship from the charge of Antinomianism. I have taken this step in the simplicity of my heart, and as due from me, in my circumstances, to the character of her ladyship. Mr. H—t—n called some time after the letter was printed, and told me, "It will not be well taken." I hope better: but be it as it will, I shall have the satisfaction of having meant well.

I have just spirit enough to enjoy my solitude, and to bless God that I am out of the hurry of the world—even the spiritual world. I tarry gladly in my Jerusalem, till the kingdom of God comes with power. Till then it matters not where I am: only as my chief call is here, here I gladly stay till God fits me for the pulpit or the grave. I still spend my mornings in scribbling. Though I grudge so much time in writing, yet a man must do something, and I may as well investigate truth as do any thing else, except solemn praying and visiting my flock. I shall be glad to have done with my present avocation, that I may give myself up more to those two things.

O how life goes! I walked, now I gallop into eternity. The bowl of life goes rapidly down the steep hill of time. Let us be wise: embrace we Jesus and the resurrection: let us trim our lamps, and give ourselves afresh to him that bought us, till we can do it without reserve. Adieu. I. F.

Madeley, *March* 21*st*, 1776.

MR. VAUGHAN.

Dear Sir,

* * * I thought I should soon have done with controversy, but now I give up the hope of having done

with it before I die. There are three sorts of people I must continually attack or defend myself against—Gallios, Pharisees, and Antinomians. I hope I shall die in this harness, fighting against some of them. I do not, however, forget that the Gallio, the Simon, and the Nicholas within, are far more dangerous to me than those without. In my own heart, that immense field, I must first fight the Lord's battles and my own. Help me here, join me in this field. All christians are here militia-men, if they are not professed soldiers. O my friend, I need wisdom—meekness of wisdom! A heart full of it is better than all your cider vault full of the most generous liquors;* and it is in Christ for us. O go and ask for you and me, and I shall ask for me and you: what a mercy is it that our Lord bears stock! May we not be ashamed nor afraid to come, and beg every moment for wine and milk, grace and wisdom.

Beware, my friend, of the world: let not its cares, nor the deceitfulness of its riches, keep, or draw you from Jesus. Before you handle the birdlime, be sure to dip your heart and hand in the oil of grace. Time flies. Years of plenty and of scarcity, of peace and war, disappear before the eternity to which we are all hastening. May we see now the winged despatch of time, as we shall see it in a dying hour, and by coming to, and abiding in Christ, our fortress and city of refuge, may we be enabled to bid defiance to our last enemy. Christ has fully overcome him, and by the victory of the head, the living members cannot but be fully victorious.

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* Alluding to a present of some cider from Mr. Vaughan.

Remember me kindly to Mrs. Vaughan. That the Lord would abundantly bless you both, in your souls, bodies, concerns, and children, is the sincere wish of, dear sir, your affectionate friend, I. F.

MACON, IN BURGUNDY, *May* 18, 1778.

THE REV. DR. CONYERS.

HON. AND DEAR SIR,

I left orders with a friend to send you a little book called "The Reconciliation," in which I endeavour to bring nearer the children of God, who are divided about their partial views of divine truths. I do not know whether that tract has in any degree answered its designs; but I believe truth can be reconciled with itself, and the candid children of God one with another. O that some abler hand, and more loving heart, would undertake to mend my plan, if it be worth mending, or draw one more agreeable to the word of God! My eyes are upon you, dear sir, and those who are like minded with you, for this work; disappoint me not of my hope. Stand forth and make way for reconciling love, by removing (so far as lies in you) what is in the way of brotherly union. O sir, the work is worthy of you! and if you saw with what boldness the false philosophers of the Continent, who are the apostles of the age, attack Christianity, and represent it as one of the worst religions in the world, and fit only to make the professors of it murder one another, or at least to contend among themselves; and how they urge our disputes to make the gospel of Christ the jest of nations, and the abhorrence of all flesh, you would break through your natural timidity, and invite all our brethren in the ministry to do what the herds do on the Swiss mountains, when wolves attack them; instead of goring one another, they unite, form a close battalion, and face the common enemy on all sides. What a shame would it be if cows and bulls showed more prudence and more regard for union, than christians and gospel ministers!

O dear sir, take courage! Be bold for the reconciling truth. Be bold for peace. You can do all things, through Christ strengthening you, and as Doctor Conyers, you can do many things,—a great many more than you think. What if you go, sir, in Christ's name, to all the gospel ministers of your acquaintance, exhort them as a father, entreat them as a brother, and bring them, or as many of them as you can, together; think you that your labour would be in vain in the Lord? Impossible, sir! O despair not! Charity hopeth all things, and, as Kempis saith, "It trieth all things, and bringeth many things to pass which would appear impossible to him who despaireth, hateth, or careth not for the sheep."

If you want a coach, or a friend to accompany you, when you go upon this errand of love, remember there is a Thornton in London, and an Ireland in Bristol, who will wish you God speed, and make your way plain before you; and God will raise many more to concur in the peaceful work. Let me humbly entreat you to go to work and to persevere in it. I wish I had strength to be at least your postilion when you go. I would drive, if not like Jehu, at least with some degree of cheerful swiftness while Christ smiled on the christian attempt. But I am confident you can do all in the absence, and without the concurrence of him who is, with brotherly love, and dutiful respect, Hon. and dear sir, your obedient servant in the gospel,

I. F.

Nyon, *July* 15*th*, 1778.

JAMES IRELAND, ESQ.

My Dear Friend,

I have ventured to preach once, and to expound once in the church. Our ministers are very kind and preach to the purpose: a young one, of this town, gave us lately a very excellent gospel sermon. Grown up people stand fast in their stupidity, or in their self-righteousness. The day I preached, I met with some children in my wood, walking or gathering strawberries.

I spoke to them about our Father—our common Father. We felt a touch of brotherly affection. They said they would sing to their Father, as well as the birds; and followed me, attempting to make such melody as you know is commonly made in these parts. I out-rode them, but some of them had the patience to follow me home, and said they would speak with me; but the people of the house stopt them, saying, I would not be troubled with children. They cried, and said, "They were sure I would not say so, for I was their good brother." The next day, when I heard it, I inquired after them, and invited them to come to me; which they have done every day since. I make them little hymns which they sing. Some of them are under sweet drawings. Yesterday I wept for joy, on hearing one speak of conviction of sin, and joy unspeakable in Christ, which had followed, as would do an experienced believer in Bristol. Last Sunday I met them in the wood: there were one hundred of them, and as many adults. Our first Pastor has since desired me to desist from preaching in the wood, (for I had exhorted) for fear of giving umbrage; and I have complied from a concurrence of circumstances which are not worth mentioning: I therefore meet them in my father's yard.

In one of my letters I promised you some anecdotes concerning the death of our two great philosophers, Voltaire and Rousseau. Mr. Tronchin, the physician of the Duke of Orleans, being sent for to attend Voltaire in his illness at Paris, Voltaire said to him, "Sir, I desire you would save my life. I will give you the half of my fortune, if you lengthen out my days only for six months. If not, I shall go to the devil, and shall carry you away along with me."

Mr. Rousseau died more decently, as full of himself as Voltaire was of the wicked one. He paid that attention to nature and the natural sun, which the Christian pays to grace and the Sun of Righteousness. These are some of his last words to his wife, which I copy from a printed letter circulating in these parts. "Open the window, that I may see the green fields once more. How beautiful is nature! How wonderful is the sun! See that glorious light it sends forth! It is God who calls me. How pleasing is death to a man who is not conscious of any sin! O God! my soul is now as pure as when it first came out of thy hands: crown it with thy heavenly bliss!" God deliver us from self and Satan, the internal and external fiend? The Lord forbid we should fall into the snare of the Sadducees, with the former of those two famous men, or into that of the Pharisees with the latter. Farewell in Jesus.

I. F.

Nyon, *September* 25, 1778.

JAMES IRELAND, ESQ.

My Dear Friend,

I am just returned from an excursion I made with my brother, through the fine vale, in the midst of the high hills which divides France from this country. In that vale we found three lakes, one on French ground, and two on Swiss; the largest is six miles long and two wide. It is the part of the country where industry is most apparent, and where population thrives best. The inhabitants are chiefly woodmen, coopers, watchmakers and jewellers. They told me they had the best singing, and the best preacher in the country. I asked if any sinners were converted under his ministry? They stared, and asked, "What I meant by conversion?" When I had explained myself, they said, "We did not live in the time of miracles."

I was better satisfied in passing through a part of the vale which belongs to the king of France. I saw a prodigious concourse of people, and supposed they kept a fair, but was agreeably surprised to find it was three missionaries, who went about as itinerant preachers, to help the regular clergy. They had been there already some days, and were three brothers, who preached morning and evening. The evening service opened by what they called a conference. One of the missionaries took the pulpit, and the parish priest proposed questions to him which he answered at full length, and in a very edifying manner. The subject was the unlawfulness and the mischief of those methods by which persons of different sexes lay snares for each other, and corrupt each other's morals. The subject was treated with delicacy, propriety and truth. The method was admirably well calculated to draw and fix the attention of a mixed multitude. This conference being ended, another missionary took the pulpit. His text was our Lord's description of the day of judgment. Before the sermon, all those, who, for the press, could kneel, did, and sung a French hymn to beg a blessing upon the word; and indeed it was blessed. An awful attention was visible upon most, and for a good part of the discourse, the voice of the preacher was almost lost in the cries and bitter wailings of the audience. When the outcry began, the preacher was describing the departure of the wicked into eternal fire. They urged that God was merciful, and that Jesus Christ had shed his blood for them.

"But that mercy you have slighted, (replied the Judge;) and now is the time of justice; that blood you have trodden under foot, and now it cries for vengeance. Know your day—slight the Father's mercy and the Son's blood no longer." I have seen but once or twice congregations as much affected in England.

One of our ministers being ill, I ventured a second time into the pulpit last Sunday; and the Sunday before I preached six miles off to two thousand people in a jail yard, where they were come to see a poor murderer two days before his execution. I was a little abused by the bailiff on the occasion, and refused the liberty of attending the poor man to the scaffold, where he was to be broken on the wheel. I hope he died penitent. The day before he suffered, he said he had broke his irons, and that as he deserved to die, he desired new ones to be put on, lest he should be tempted to make his escape a second time.

You ask what I designed to do? I propose, if it be the Lord's will, to spend a winter here, to bear my testimony against the trade of my countrymen, which Voltaire describes thus—

Barbares dont la guerre est l'unique metier,
Et qui vendent leur sang a qui veut le paier.

In the spring I shall, if nothing prevents, return to England with you, or with Mr. Perronet, if his affairs are settled, or alone if other ways fail. In the meanwhile, I rejoice with you in Jesus, and in the glorious hope of that complete salvation his faithfulness has promised, and his power can never be at a loss to bestow. We must be saved by faith and hope till we are saved by perfect love, and made partakers of heavenly glory.

I am truly a stranger here. Well, then, as strangers let us go where we shall meet the assembly of the righteous gathered in Jesus. Farewell in him, you and yours.
I. F.

Nyon, *December* 15, 1779.

TO A NOBLEMAN.

My Lord,

If the American Colonies and the West India Islands are rent from the crown there will not grow one ear of corn the less in Great Britain. We shall still have the necessaries of life, and, what is more, the gospel, and liberty to hear it. If the great springs of trade and wealth are cut off, good men will bear that loss without much sorrow; for the springs of wealth are always springs of luxury, which, sooner or later, destroy the empires corrupted by wealth. Moral good may come out of our losses: I wish you may see it in England. People on the continent imagine they see it already in the English on their travels, who are said to behave with more wisdom, and less haughtiness, than they were used to do.

Last year saw the death of three great men of these parts—Rousseau, Voltaire, and Baron Haller, a senator of Berne. The last, who is not much known, I think, in England, was a great philosopher, a profound politician, and an agreeable poet; but he was particularly famous for his skill in botany, anatomy, and physic. He has enriched the republic of letters by such a number of publications in Latin and German, that the catalogue of them is alone a pamphlet.

This truly great man has given another proof of the truth of Lord Bacon's assertion, that "although smatterers in philosophy are often impious, true philosophers are always religious." I have met with an old, pious, apostolic clergyman who was intimate with the Baron, and used to accompany him over the Alps, in his rambles after the wonders of nature. "With what pleasure," said the minister, "did we admire and adore the wisdom of the God of nature, and sanctify our researches by the sweet praises of the God of grace!"

When the emperor passed this way, he stabbed Voltaire to the heart by not paying him a visit; but he waited on Haller, was two hours with him, and heard from him such pious talk, as he never heard from half the philosophers of the age. The Baron was then ill of the disorder which afterwards carried him off.

Upon his death-bed he went through sore conflicts about his interest in Christ; and sent to the old minister, requesting his most fervent prayers, and wishing him to find the way through the dark valley smoother than he found it himself. However, in his last moments, he expressed a renewed confidence in God's mercy, through Christ, and died in peace. The old clergyman added, that he thought the Baron went through this conflict to humble him thoroughly, and, perhaps, to chastise him for having sometimes given way to a degree of self-complacence, at the thought of his amazing parts, and of the respect they procured him from the learned world. He was obliged to become last in his own eyes, that he might become first and truly great in the sight of the Lord. I am, my lord, &c. I. F.

Nyon, *March* 7, 1780.

MR. WILLIAM WASE.

My Dear Brother,

I am sorry the building* has come to so much more than I intended; but, as the mischief is done, it is a matter to exercise patience, resignation, and self-denial; and it will be a caution in future. I am going to sell part of my little estate here to discharge the debt. I had laid by £50 to print a small work which I wanted to distribute here; but, as I must be just before I presume to offer that mite to the God of truth, I lay by the design, and shall send that sum to Mr. York. Money is so scarce here, at this time, that I shall sell at a very great loss; but necessity and justice are two great laws which must be obeyed. As I design on my return to England, to pinch until I have got rid of this debt, I may go and live in one of the cottages belonging to the vicar, if he could let the vicarage for a few pounds; and in that case, I dare say, Mr. Greaves would be so good as to take the other little house.

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* A building which Mr. Fletcher had undertaken at his own expense, as a school for the gratuitous instruction of children, &c.—Ed.

My dear friend, let us die to sin; hold fast Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life; walk by faith in him, and not by the sight and passions of the old Adam. I hope the sun of affliction, which burns poor England and us, will ripen us all for glory. Give my best love to all our friends in Christ, and tell them, that the hope of seeing them does me good, and that I trust they will not turn it into bitterness; which would be the case if I should find them out of the narrow way, and out of the kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Lord. Salute dear John York; hold up his hands for me, and bid him stand fast in the Lord; leaning upon the cross of Him who bruised the serpent's head, and overcame death, hell and the grave, by pulling out sin, the sting of death. Farewell in Jesus Christ.

I. F.

Nyon, *Sept* 15*th*, 1780.

THE REV. MR. GREAVES.*

My Dear Fellow-Labourer,

I had fixed the time of my departure for this month; but now two hindrances stand in my way. When I came to collect the parts of my manuscript, I found the most considerable parts wanting; and after many searches I was obliged to write it over again. This accident obliged me to put off my journey; and now the change of weather has brought back some symptoms of my disorder. I speak, or rather, whisper, with difficulty; but I hope the quantity of grapes I begin to eat will have as good an effect upon me as in the last two autumns. Have patience then a little while. If things are not as you could wish, you can do but as I have done for many years—learn patience by the things which you suffer. Crossing our will, getting the better of our own inclinations, and growing in experience, are no mean advantages; and they may all be yours. Mr. Ireland writes me word, that if I return to England now, the winter will undo all I have been doing for my health for many years. However, I have not quite laid by the design of spending the winter with you; but dont expect me till you see me. I am, nevertheless, firmly purposed, that if I do not set out this autumn, I shall do so next spring as early as I can.

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* The clergyman who officiated for Mr. Fletcher at Madeley during his absence.

Till I had this relapse, I was able, thank God, to exhort in a private room three times a week: but the Lord Lieutenant will not allow me to get into a pulpit, though they permit the school-masters, who are laymen, to put on a band and read the church prayers: so high runs the prejudice. The clergy, however, tell me, that if I will renounce my ordination, and get Presbyterian orders among them, they will allow me to preach: and, on these terms, one of the ministers of this town offers me his curacy. A young clergyman of Geneva, tutor to my nephew, appears to me a truly converted man; and he is so pleased when I tell him there are converted souls in England, that he will go over with me to learn English, and converse with the British christians. He wrote last summer with such force to some of the clergy, who were stirring up the fire of persecution, that he made them ashamed, and we have since had peace from that quarter.

There is little genuine piety in these parts: nevertheless, there is yet some of the form of it: so far as to go to the Lord's table regularly four times a-year. There meet the adulterers, the drunkards, the swearers, the infidels, and even the materialists. They have no idea of the double damnation that awaits hypocrites. They look upon partaking that sacrament as a ceremony enjoined by the magistrate. At Zurich, the first town in this country, they have lately beheaded a clergyman, who wanted to betray his country to the emperor, to whom it chiefly belonged. It is the town of the great reformer Zuinglius; yet there they poisoned the sacramental wine a few years ago. Tell it not in Gath! I mention this to show you there is occasion and great need to bear a testimony against the faults of the clergymen here; and if I cannot do it from the pulpit, I must try to do it from the press. Their canons, which were composed by two hundred and thirty pastors, at the time of the reformation, are so spiritual and apostolic, that I design to translate them into English, if I am spared.

Farewell, my dear brother. Take care, good, constant care, of the flock committed to your charge; especially the sick and the young. Salute all our dear parishioners. Let me still have a part in your prayers, public and private; and rejoice in the Lord, as, through grace, I am enabled to do in all my little tribulations. I am your affectionate friend and fellow-labourer,

I. F.

MADELEY, *September* 3*d*, 1781.

THE RIGHT HON. LADY MARY FITZGERALD.

MY MUCH HONOURED LADY,

Two days ago I came here after an absence of above a month; and yesterday I received the honour of your letter without date, which has been, I am told, waiting here some time. What a pity I did not rejoice sooner in the good news you send me, that you desire to be entirely devoted to God. Indeed complaints follow, but heaven is in that holy desire. If you cultivate it, it will produce all that conformity to a holy God, which love can bring to a human soul, called to partake of the divine nature. As for your complaints, they are the natural expressions of that repentance which precedes, in our hearts, the coming of the comforter, who is to abide with us for ever. I am ready to rejoice or mourn with my honoured friend, and I have abundant cause to do both, with respect to myself, my ministrations, the church, and my people.

And will you, indeed, find it in your heart to honour my house with your presence, and perfume also with your prayers the plain apartments occupied by your friend Johnson? I wonder at nothing on earth when I consider the condescension with which Emmanuel came down from heaven, and filled a stable with his glory. Your time, my condescending friend, will suit me best. You will be queen in my hermitage, the Lord will rule in our hearts, and you will command under him within our walls. You smile, perhaps, at the vastness of your new empire; but if you can be content and happy in God in my homely solitude, you will make greater advances towards bliss than if you obtained the principality of Wales. But if you cannot be happy with Jesus, prayer, praise, godly conversation and retirement, expect a disappointment.—However, my honoured friend, if you come, come as the serious Catholics go on a pilgrimage, as French noblemen go to the Carthusian convent at La Trappe, as the French king's aunts went to the Carmelites:—come and do evangelical penance. Our good friend, Johnson, will tell you of an upper room, where we crucify our old man, and have had many a visit from the new. If you do not bring her with you, bring her faith, which brought him down, and then you shall not pine for the company of earthly princes. The prince of peace and life himself will keep his court in our cottage, and your heart shall be one of his favourite thrones.

I hope, my lady, you will bring us good news of our friends in St. James' Place. My heart visits them often, and if bodies could move as quick as thought, they would be importuned frequently with my company. If you write to them before I do, convey my christian and grateful love in your letter, and accept it yourself from, my honoured and dear lady, your dutiful servant in Christ, I. F.

MADELEY, *Sept.* 29*th*, 1781.

THE RIGHT HON. LADY MARY FITZGERALD.

MY DEAR AND HONOURED FRIEND,

You have been in the fire of affliction, where faith is tried, where patient hope is exercised, and where perfect love, which casts out fear, and endureth all things, is proved worthy of him who made bare his breast, and said to his Father, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God!" I come to be obedient unto death, even the painful, shameful death of the cross.

Continue to offer your body as a living, or, if it please God, as a lingering, dying sacrifice to him who has decreed, that if we will reign with Christ, we must suffer with him. This is our reasonable service; for it would be absurd that our Lord should have been perfected by sufferings, thorns, and the cross, and that we should have nothing but enjoyment, roses, and a crown. How faithful, how merciful is our God! He brings you once more from the verge of eternity: well, my dear friend, I welcome you back into life, and into the enjoyment of farther opportunities of receiving and doing good—of growing in grace, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.

Chastened, spared like you, and more and more convinced that I am helplessness itself, and that there is help laid on our Surety and Saviour for us, I invite you to say with me—"When I am weak, Christ, my life, is strong still: for me to live shall be Christ, and to die gain." Dear madam, to know the bare cross is uncomfortable; but to know and gather the fruit of that tree, is life from the dead, it is more abundant life after fainting. Let us then know, *i. e.* consider, and embrace Jesus Christ, crucified to make an end of sin; his shedding tears, and his most precious blood, to cleanse us from all sin; to trace again the divine image, goodness, love, and happiness on our souls, and to seal our firm title to glory.

"Not a text," say you, "came to me, only I knew none perished at his feet:" then you remember Christ, the sum and substance of all the scriptures: then you believed on him, in whom all the sweetest texts, and all the promises are yea, and amen. O believe more steadily, more confidently. Dare even to obey the apostolic precept, "Reckon youself dead indeed unto sin, but alive to God by Jesus Christ our Lord." Embrace with more earnestness the righteousness of faith, and you will have more peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Rejoice in Christ, your peace; yea, rejoice in God, your Saviour; and if there is a needs be for your being in heaviness for a season, rejoice in tribulation: sorrowful, but always rejoicing. "When I am destitute of all comfort, this shall yield me comfort," says Kempis, "That thy will is done." If Abraham believed in hope against hope, that is, against human natural hope; can you not, through grace, as a daughter of Abraham, rejoice in heavenly hope against all natural feelings, and even against all temptations? Count it all joy, says St. James, when you fall into divers temptations and trials. Don't be afraid of the storm: Christ is in the ship, and he does not sleep, as unbelief is apt to fancy.

I thank you, my dear lady, for your friendly wish of leaving your clay here. I return it, by wishing you may leave all the body of sin, now, in that mysterious grotto of mount Calvary, where myriads of sinners have buried their doubts, their fears, and their old man. Prop up your clay a little longer, for I want to sing with you, "Salvation to God and the Lamb." I want you to help me, with the understanding and the voice, to witness, that Jesus saves to the uttermost, all who come to God through him; that he can not only make an end of sin, but bring in an everlasting, triumphant righteousness.

I am not without hope of seeing you in London before you see your future hermitage. All my brotherly love goes to town, and salutes you and your good nurses, Mrs. C——, Mrs. ——, Mrs. ——, Mrs. ——, Mrs. L——; to whose continued care, as well as to that of our dear Redeemer, I earnestly recommend you. I am, my dear lady, your obedient, affectionate servant,

I. F.

Cross Hall, Yorkshire, *Dec.* 26, 1781.

THE HON. MRS. C——.

My Very Dear Friend,

Your favour of the 4th instant did not reach me until a considerable time after date, through my being still absent from Madeley; a clergyman of this neighbourhood having made an exchange with me to facilitate my settling some affairs of a temporal nature in this country. The kind part you take in my happiness demands my warmest thanks; and I beg you will accept them, multiplied by those which my dear partner presents to you. Yes, my dear friend, I am married in my old age, and have a new opportunity of considering a great mystery, in the most perfect type of our

Lord's mystical union with his church. I have now a new call to pray for a fulness of Christ's holy, gentle, meek, loving Spirit, that I may love my wife, as he loved his spouse, the Church. But the emblem is greatly deficient: the Lamb is worthy of his spouse, and more than worthy, whereas I must acknowledge myself unworthy of the yoke-fellow whom heaven has reserved for me. She is a person after my own heart; and I make no doubt we shall increase the number of the happy marriages in the church militant. Indeed, they are not so many, but it may be worth a christian's while to add one more to the number. God declared it was not good, that man, a social being, should live alone, and therefore he gave him a help meet for him: for the same reason our Lord sent forth his disciples two and two. Had I searched the three kingdoms, I could not have found one brother willing to share gratis my weal, wo, and labours, and complaisant enough to unite his fortunes to mine; but God has found me a partner, *a sister, a wife,* to use St. Paul's language, who is not afraid to face with me the colliers and bargemen of my parish, until death part us.

Buried together in our country village, we shall help one another to trim our lamps, and wait, as I trust you do, continually, for the coming of the heavenly bridegroom. Well, for us the heavenly child is born, to us a double son is given, and with him the double kingdom of grace and glory. O my dear friend, let us press into, and meet in, both of these kingdoms. Our Surety and Saviour is the way and the door into them: and blessed be free grace, the way is free as the king's highway, and the door open like the arms of Jesus crucified.

January 1*st*, 1782. I live, blessed be God, to devote myself again to his blessed service in this world, or in the next, and to wish my dear friends all the blessings of a year of jubilee. Whatever this year brings forth, may it bring us to the fullest measures of salvation attainable on earth, and the most complete preparation for heaven. I have a solemn call to gird my loins and keep my lamp burning. Strangely restored to health and strength, considering my years, by the good nursing of my dear partner, I ventured to preach of late as often as I did formerly, and after having read prayers and preached twice on Christmas day, &c. I did, last Sunday, what I had never done—I continued doing duty from ten till past four in the afternoon, owing to christenings, churchings, and the sacrament, which I administered to a church full of people; so that I was obliged to go from the communion table to begin the evening service, and then to visit some sick. This has brought back upon me one of my old dangerous symptoms, so that I had flattered myself in vain, to do the whole duty of my own parish. My dear wife is nursing me with the tenderest care, gives me up to God with the greatest resignation, and helps me to rejoice, that life and death, health and sickness, work all for our good, and are all ours, as blessed instruments to forward us in our journey to heaven. We intend to set out for Madeley to-morrow. The prospect of a winter's journey is not sweet; but the prospect of meeting you and your dear sister, and lady Mary, and Mrs. L——, and Mrs. G——, and all our other companions in tribulation, in heaven, is delightful. The Lord prepare and fit us for that glorious meeting! As soon as I reach Madeley I shall write to lady Mary. Give my best respects to her, to our dear sister, and to the ladies I have just named, and believe me to be, my dear friend and fellow-traveller to Zion, your most obliged and affectionate servant, I. F.

P. S. If lady Huntingdon is in London, I would beg you present my duty to her, with my best wishes.

MADELEY, *Jan.* 1782.

THE RIGHT HON. LADY MARY FITZGERALD.

I thank you, my lady, for your kind congratulations on my marriage. The Lord has indeed blessed me with a partner after my own heart—dead to the world, and wanting, as well as myself, to be filled with all the life of God. She joins me in dutiful thanks to your ladyship, for your obliging remembrance of her in your kind letter, and will help me to welcome you to the little hermitage we spoke of last year in London, if your ladyship's health or taste should call you to retire, for a while, from the hurry of the town.

What a difference between the court of the King of Kings, and that of King George! How peaceable the former, how full of hurry the latter! The Prince himself welcomes us, and manifests himself to us, as Prince of peace, as Emmanuel, God with us. He will even bring his kingdom, and keep his court in our hearts. If we open them, by the attention and recollection of faith, he will even sup with us, and make us taste the sweetness of that bread which came down from heaven, and the virtue of that blood which cleanses from all sin. That this may be our constant experience, and that of our dear companions in tribulation in St. James' place, is the sincere and frequent wish of, my lady, your most obliged and obedient servant, I. F.

MADELEY, *Dec.* 19, 1782.

THE REV. MR. CHARLES WESLEY.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

I thank you for your hint about exemplifying the love of Christ and his church. I hope we do. I was afraid, at first, to say much of the matter: for new married people do not at first know each other: but having now lived fourteen months in my new state, I can tell you, Providence has reserved a prize for me, and that my wife is far better to me, than the church to Christ; so that if the parallel fails, it will be on my side.

Be so good as to peruse the enclosed sheets. Mr. De Luc, to whom they are addressed, is reader to the queen, and the author of some volumes of letters to her: he is a true philosopher. I flatter myself he will present my letter to the queen. Do you find any thing improper in the addition I have made to my Poem? I wish I were near you for your criticisms: you would direct me both as a poet and a Frenchman.

I have yet strength enough to do my parish duty without the help of a curate. O that the Lord would help me to do it acceptably and profitably! The colliers began to rise in this neighbourhood: happily the cockatrice's egg was crushed before the serpent came out. However, I got many a hearty curse from the colliers, for the plain words I spoke on that occasion. I want to see days of power both within and without; but in the meantime I would follow closely my light in the narrow path. My wife joins me in respectful love to Mrs. Wesley and yourself, and requesting an interest in your prayers for us, I remain, my dear sir, your affectionate, obliged brother, servant and son, in the gospel, I. F.

DUBLIN, *Aug.* 23, 1783.

THE RIGHT HON. LADY MARY FITZGERALD.

HONOURED AND DEAR MADAM,

I see the truth of those words of our Lord, "In me ye shall have peace, comfort, strength and joy; be of good cheer." We came here to see the members of our Lord, and we find you removed, and removing farther still than you now are. What does this Providence teach us? I learn that I must rejoice in the Lord above all his members, and find them all in him who fills all in all; who is the life of all our friends, the joy of all our brethren. If our Lord is your life, your strength, and your all, you will remove in vain to the north or south, you cannot go from your spiritual friends; they will meet you in the common centre of all life and righteousness; there they will bless you, rejoice in your joy, and sympathize in your sorrow.

If providence calls you to England by Scotland, by which route your ladyship apprehends so much difficulty, you know we must, at least, go to heaven by a way equally painful—the narrow way, the way marked with blood, and with the tears and cross of the Son of God; and if we follow him weeping, we shall return with everlasting joy on our heads. Even now the foretaste of those joys is given to us through hope, for by hope we are saved. Let our faith and hope be in God; rooted and grounded in him who gives vital heat to our hearts, and who fans there the spark of grace, which his mercy has kindled; and may that spark, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, become a fire of holy love, heavenly zeal, and heavenly glory. Such power belongeth to the Almighty. He that spared not his own son, and has promised us his Holy Spirit, which is the mighty stream of his grace, and the mighty flame of his love, will not deny us that power, if we wait for it in his appointed ways, and ask it in the all prevailing name of Emmanuel, God with us.

My dear partner, who, like myself, is deeply sensible of your ladyship's kindness in remembering us, joins me in thanks for your obliging note, and in cordial wishes, that all the desires of your believing soul may be granted you, both for time, death, and eternity. We subscribe ourselves, with grateful sincerity, honoured madam, your devoted servants in our bleeding Lord,

I. & M. F.

MADELEY, *November* 1783.

TO WILLIAM SMYTH, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

The many and great favours you have loaded us with, during our long stay under your hospitable roof, prompted us to make the earliest acknowledgment of our obligations, and to beg you would receive our warmest thanks for such unexpected and undeserved tokens of brotherly love. But the desire of filling our only frank has hindered their being more early traced upon paper; though they have been, are now, and, we trust, shall ever be, deeply engraven on our hearts. You have united for us the Irish hospitality, the English cordiality, and the French politeness. And now, sir, what shall we say? You are our generous benefactor, and we are your affectionate, though unprofitable servants. In one sense, we are on a level with those to whom you show charity in the streets: we can do nothing but pray for you, your dear partner, and your's. You kindly received us for Christ's sake; may God receive you freely for his sake also! You have borne with our infirmities, the Lord bear with your's also! You have let your servant serve us;—the Lord give all his servants and his angels charge concerning you, that you hurt not your foot against a stone, and may be helped out of every difficulty! You have given us a most pleasing resting place, and comfortable apartment under your roof, and next your own chamber:—the Lord grant you eternal rest with him in his heavenly mansions! May he himself be your habitation and resting place for ever, and place you and your's with his own jewels in the choicest repository of precious things! You have fed us with the richest food:—may the giver of every perfect gift fit you for a place at his table, and may you rank there with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! You have given us wines:—may you drink, with Christ himself, the fruit of the vine, new in your Father's kingdom! You have given us a rich provision for the way:—when you cross the flood, the deep flood of death, may you find that your heavenly Lord has made such a rich provision of faith, righteousness, hope, and joy, for you, that you may rejoice, triumph, and sing, while you leave your earthly friends to go home! which, by-the-bye, is more than we were enabled to do; for instead of singing in our cabins, there was very different melody.

However, we could soon, with grateful, joyful hearts, look back from the British to the Irish shore, and greet in spirit the dear friends we had left there. The Lord bless and increase them in spiritual, and, if best for them, in temporal goods also! The Lord crown them and their's with loving kindness, and mercies equal to the love of our God, and the merits of our Saviour!

And now, dear sir, what shall I add? I cannot now even see my Bible but through the medium of your love, and the token with which it alternately loads my pocket and my hand. I cannot even seal a letter with a good wafer, but I find a new call to repeat my thanks to you. I would begin again, but my scrap of paper is full, as well as my heart; and I must spare a line to tell you that I had the pleasure of seeing our kind benefactress, Mrs. Smyth, safe at Bristol, with her little charge and lady Mary. We beg our thanks to John, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, and all who were kind to us for Christ's sake, and for your's. We remain, dear sir, your most affectionate and most obliged pensioners and servants, I. & M. F.

MADELEY, *September* 13*th*, 1784.

JAMES IRELAND, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Surely the Lord keeps us both in slippery places, that we may still set loose to all below. Let us do so more and more, and make the best of those days which the Lord grants us to finish the work he has given us to do. O let us fall in with the gracious designs of his providence! trim our lamps, gird our loins, and prepare to escape to the heavenly shore, as Paul did when he saw the leaky ship ready to go to the bottom, and made himself ready to swim to land.

I keep in my centry-box till Providence removes me: my situation is quite suited to my little strength;

I may do as much or as little as I please, according to my weakness; and I have an advantage which I can have nowhere else in such a degree; my little field of action is just at my own door, so that if I happen to overdo myself, I have but a step from my pulpit to my bed, and from my bed to my grave. I wish brother Tandy joy about opposition. This must be, and the more of it, the more will the word of God prevail. If I had a body full of vigour, and a purse full of money, I should like well enough to travel about as Mr. Wesley does, but as Providence does not call me to it, I readily submit. The snail does best in its shell: were it to aim at galloping like the race horse, it would be ridiculous indeed. I thank God, my wife, who joins me in thanks to you for your kind offer, is quite of my mind with respect to the call we have to a sedentary life. We are two poor invalids, who, between us, make half a labourer. * * * * I. F.

Madeley, *June 20th*, 1784.

MRS. GREENWOOD.

My Dear Friend,

I shall never forget the mercy which the living and the dead have showed me; but the sight of Mr. Greenwood in his son, has brought some of my Newington scenes fresh to my remembrance, and I beg leave to convey my tribute of thanks back by his hands.—Thanks! Thanks! What, nothing but words? Here is my humbling case; I wish to requite your manifold kindness, but I cannot; and so I must be satisfied to be ever your insolvent debtor. Nature and grace do not love it. Proud nature lies uneasy under great obligations, and thankful grace would be glad to put something in the scale, opposite to that which you have filled with so many favours. But what shall I put? I wish I could send you all the Bank of England, and all the gospel of Christ; but the first is not mine, and the second is already your's: so, praying the Lord Jesus to make up my deficiencies with you, as he has done with his Father, I remain your still unprofitable, and still obliged Lazarus, I. F.

THE END.